THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY DISCUSSION CONCERNING THE CONTINUANCE OF MIRACLES AFTER THE APOSTOLIC AGE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WRITINGS OF CONYERS MIDDLETON

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PREFACE

The following pages deal with a controversy which developed in the eighteenth century among certain English theologians over whether the genuine miraculous powers of the Apostles had continued for some time in the Early Church.

The suggestion that the controversy would be a fruitful thesis subject was made by Professor John Baillie in a lecture at New College, the University of Edinburgh, in 1953.

In addition to Dr. Baillie, other persons to whom acknowledgments should be made are The Reverend J. S. McEwen, lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, and Professor D. M. G. Stalker of the University of Edinburgh, who were supervisors during the preparation of the thesis.

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Certain details with regard to the body of the dissertation should be mentioned. All quoted material obeys the punctuation and spelling of the original sources. The spelling of the rest of the material is according to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. The quotations from the Scriptures, except where otherwise indicated, are from the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, Limited, and copyrighted by the Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A, 1946 and 1952. The publishers have granted permission to quote the material.

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INTRODUCTION

About the middle of the eighteenth century, an English theologian and Cambridge University Librarian, The Reverend Conyers Middleton, D.D. (1683-1750) presented three provocative works which challenged the position of the orthodox theologians that the genuine miraculous powers had continued in the Church for some time after the days of the Apostles. The title of the first publication, which appeared in April, 1747, states the conclusion that provoked a controversy: An Introductory Discourse to a Larger Work, Designed Hereafter To Be Published Concerning the Miraculous Powers Which Are Supposed To Have Subsisted in the Christian Church from the Earliest Ages, through Several Successive Centuries: tending to shew [sic] that we have no sufficient reason to believe upon the authority of the Primitive Fathers, that any such powers were continued to the Church after the Days of the Apostles. The second work, a brief publication which came off the press in 1748, was entitled, Remarks on Two Pamphlets Lately Published, against Dr. Middleton's Introductory Discourse. The next year the third and fuller treatment was published: A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, Which Are Supposed To Have Subsisted in the Christian Church from the Earliest Ages, through Several Successive Centuries.

The argument of these publications was in contradiction to the almost unanimous view of the English theologians that the Apostolic miraculous powers had continued through at least the first three centuries of the Church. The orthodox position was that the testimony of Scrip-

ture and that of the Fathers support the continuing of miracles, and other rational arguments are additional support. Middleton contended that these arguments are not adequate evidence, and, in fact, the testimony of the Fathers weighs against the miracles.

Not only was Middleton's conclusion in disagreement with the traditional position, but his method of arriving at it was different. He used a historical method that was basically empirical and investigative. The tenor of theological discussion at his time was generally rationalistic. Rationalism had penetrated theology and had expended itself in reasonable Christianity. In connection with this penetration, the deistic controversy had developed, and in the course of this discussion, the orthodox felt that they had satisfactorily defended both the reasonability of the Christian doctrines and the credibility of the miracles performed in confirmation of them. However, this was not the case. Many of the formerly reliable assumptions had been crippled, and several questions about the miracles had been left unanswered. Still, the sceptical note on which the controversy had ended aroused little further creative effort in defense of the Creed.

Middleton's publications were a postscript to the deistic discussions. He, along with David Hume(1711-1776), temporarily revived an interest in miracles, but enthusiasm for theological controversy was waning, and so only a few mediocre replies were offered to their bold criticism.

This thesis examines Middleton's writings and evaluates the discussion which resulted over them. It begins by relating what his views were and how he presented them. Next comes a brief consideration of how he conflicted with the position of the traditional theologians, and how

they reacted to his publications. This is followed by an investigation of the background of theological discussion in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in England, and a note about Middleton and his qualifications for undertaking his work. The next chapter, which concludes the first section of the thesis, looks at the various approaches which the theologians of the century were making to the question at hand.

The second part of the thesis surveys the examination which Middleton made in support of his argument that the testimony on continuing miracles contains more fiction than fact.

The third part discusses the effect which the controversy had on the ecclesiastical life and thought in England in the eighteenth century, and evaluates certain developments which have vindicated the method which Middleton suggested as legitimate and valuable in theological inquiry.

Some value can be found in the discussion in the eighteenth century over continuing miracles, though it has to be looked for elsewhere than in the replies to Middleton; it has to be found, rather in the paths toward which his works pointed, than in the well-worn trails which his critics took.

PART I

THE SUBJECT,

THE BACKGROUND,

AND THE APPROACH

CHAPTER I

INQUIRY AND TRADITION

1. Middleton's Presentation of His Views
2. His Conflict with the Traditional Views
3. The Immediate Reaction

Before the appearance of Middleton's writings, it had scarcely been whispered that the miracles which had allegedly continued in the Church after the days of the Apostles might not have been genuine. The Scriptures as well as other compelling evidences seemed to give a foundation of rock to the traditional view that they had been. The venerated Fathers had given positive testimony, and there were rational arguments to support them. Middleton smashed into a formidable force of tradition, then, when he suggested a critical examination of the evidence.

His dissatisfaction with the evidence was the primary reason for his disagreement with the traditional view. He was convinced that the orthodox theologians had their eyes closed, and, therefore, they were failing to see the case of the continuing miracles in its real light.

This chapter will examine why and how Middleton objected to the traditional position, and the immediate reaction to his inquiries.

1. Middleton's Presentation of His Views

The Introductory Discourse, which appeared almost two years before the more complete Free Inquiry, begins with a discussion on the disagreement over the exact time when genuinely Apostolic miracles were

no more. Middleton observes that certain divines were allowing them beyond the third century. However, from that time on, the Church became increasingly corrupt, and since it was already corrupt, it is dangerous to admit any post-Apostolic miracles.

He develops his thesis around a historical argument which uses the fourth century as a watershed. He observes that, if one is unbiased, he admits that this century marks the introduction of most of the contemporary corruptions of the Church of Rome. Lies and forgeries originated with the bishops, the clergy, and the principal champions of the Christian cause, who in their zeal to establish new rites and doctrines tampered with miracles.

Looking forward from the fourth century, he argues that its forgeries taint the credit of all later claims.

The traditional view was in almost unanimous agreement.

Looking backward, he offers four conclusions on what the early doctrinal infection of the Church suggests. First, the fraud and forgery which were evident in the fourth century did not appear suddenly. Second, though there was no need of miracles by that time, forgeries resulted just the same, and so it is reasonable to expect that they had existed earlier, when the persecution of Christians was taking place. Third, in comparison with the fourth-century Fathers, the saints of the earlier centuries had less learning, less judgment, and more credulity than their successors. Fourth, the character of men in the earlier ages, despite the fact that a few leading churchmen consider those years the purest period of the Church, was no better than the character of men in the later ages; the first three centuries of Christianity abounded in

heresies, spurious writings, and forged books, which the Fathers considered equal to the authority of Scripture. These four considerations lead one to suspect the miracles alleged to have been performed before the fourth century.

The Free Inquiry spends less time discussing the historical corruptions of the Church, and more analyzing the testimony and criticizing the miracles themselves. Middleton says that his purpose is "to discover the precise period and duration of them; and to settle some rule of discerning the true from the false; so as to be able to give a proper reason for admitting the miracles of one age, and rejecting those of another."[1]

He deals in the Preface with the help the Scriptures give in settling the matter. He is concerned especially with the nature, method, and purpose of the Apostolic miraculous powers. He had already observed that Jesus's promise, as Mark records it in his closing verses[2], does not specify how long they were to continue. He insists that Jesus had minimized their importance in the work of the Apostles. Even in the infancy of the Gospel, the power to perform miracles was not the most important witness to the truth of Christianity. Nor should the disciples be thought of as continually inspired; they were often left to their own natural faculties and to the impulses which move ordinary men. Their power to perform a miracle was temporary and occasional. As soon as it was performed, the ability to do it was retracted or suspended. Middleton is convinced that Jesus had taught His disciples that the success of their ministry must depend as much upon the purity of their lives as upon the impressions made by their miraculous works.

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1. Conyers Middleton, The Miscellaneous Works of the Late Reverend Conyers Middleton(2d ed., London: Printed for R. Manby, et. al., 1755), I, xxxix.

2. Mark 16:17-18

Next follows an argument which is antithetical to the orthodox position and precludes his reasoning on the cessation of miraculous powers from being completely scientific; he assumes that they had ceased upon the death of the Apostles because they were no longer needed. Whereas the orthodox had argued that miracles were needed in the infancy of Christianity and into its childhood in the first three centuries, he maintains that the Apostles and first disciples had laid a foundation for the Church sufficient to sustain the structure that was to be erected upon it. After the first Christians had proved their courage and had conquered the first and principal difficulties which posed opposition to the spread of the Gospel, the need for miracles ceased. This happened during the times of the Apostles. With churches established in all the chief cities of the Roman Empire, and with a regular ministry ordained, the miraculous powers were finally withdrawn, "and the Gospel left to make the rest of its way, by its own strength, and the natural force of those divine graces; with which it was so richly stored, Faith, Hope, and Charity."[1]

Middleton next discusses the empirical method he plans to use and then outlines his plan as follows:

> i. To draw out, in their proper order, all the principal testimonies, which relate to the miraculous gifts of the church, as they are found in the writings of the fathers, from the earliest ages, after the days of the apostles. Whence we shall see, at one view, the whole evidence, by which they have hitherto been supported.
>
> ii. To throw together all, which those fathers also have delivered, concerning the condition of the persons who are said to have been endued with those gifts, and to have wrought the miracles, to which they appeal.

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1. Middleton, op. cit., p. xxvii.

iii. To illustrate the particular characters and opinions of the fathers, who attest these miracles; so as to enable us to determine with more exactness, what degree of credit may be due to their testimony.

iv. To review all the several kinds of miracles, which are pretended to have been wrought, and to observe, from the nature of each, how far the credibility of them may reasonably be suspected.

v. To refute some of the most plausible objections, which have hitherto been made by my antagonists, or which the prejudices and prepossessions of many pious Christians may be apt to suggest to the general turn of the argument.[1]

The conclusion of the first section is that the silence of testimony in the first forty or fifty years after the deaths of the Apostles proves that the miraculous powers had vanished. Since no justifiable reason can be given for their revival, the abundance of testimony which the Fathers from the second century on present is not convincing.

The argument of the second section is that the later testimony is of little value and the miracles are to be discounted because the persons who are said to have performed them were obscure figures, women or young boys or other persons of little respect and reputation.

The third section concentrates on examining the views of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, in an attempt to show that they lacked sound judgment and propagated false teachings, thereby damaging their character, and they represent the character of the Fathers of the first three centuries.

The fourth section, the largest of the Inquiry, examines the six miraculous powers which Middleton finds in the Primitive testimony. The absurdity of the facts and the credulity of the witnesses make the testimony incredible, little more than fiction. The miracles are more easily explained as natural effects.

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1. Conyers Middleton, A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers Which Are Supposed to Have Subsisted in the Christian Church from the Earliest Ages through Several Successive Centuries (London: 1755), pp. 1 f.

The last section answers the objections voiced against the Introductory Discourse and anticipates and answers the objections to the Free Inquiry. The essence of the objections is that Middleton damages the evidence of Christianity and jeopardizes a faith in historical testimony. The essence of his replies is that reliable evidence establishes Christianity, apart from the evidence of the post-Apostolic miracles; that the criticism of the Fathers' testimony does no damage to Scripture; and that rather than hurting the cause of history, a scientific examination of historical testimony credits what should be credited and discredits what should be discredited.

In reply to William Dodwell, Thomas Church, and others, Middleton wrote a Vindication of his previous publications, but this posthumous work does not measure up to the standard of objectivity which he had followed earlier. He answered the charges against him of latent scepticism, re-emphasizing his position that no credible testimony on continuing miracles exists, and reasserting his concern for the exposition of the truth, regardless of the consequences. He was eager to have his opponents understand that his position is not concerned with whether God can work miracles when He pleases; he insisted that God can work them at any time. Neither was he desirous of entering into a discussion over whether God has performed any miracles since the days of the Apostles. He says, "The single point, which I maintain is, that the Church had no standing power of working any."[1]

2. His Conflict with the Traditional Views

Middleton conflicted with the traditional theologians, who would not accept the Roman Catholic miracles, but welcomed those of the Early

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 167.

Church. He insisted that this position is inconsistent. He was justified in doing so.

Throughout the eighteenth century most theologians discriminated against the Roman Catholic wonders--and false miracles in general-- by examining the reasonableness of the doctrine supposedly confirmed by them, or the reasonableness of the method of performing the miracles, or the qualifications of the persons performing or testifying to them.

The arguments against the Roman Catholic pretenses are nowhere better summarized than in the objections which Archbishop Tillotson(1630-1694) offered in the seventeenth century:

> And now I am sorry I have occasion to say it, but it is too true, that the miracles pretended to by the Church of Rome, for the confirmation of their erroneous doctrines, are of the same stamp with these [pretenses of the heathens], taxed by several of their best writers, of imposture and forgery, of fable and romance, so extravagant and freakish, and fantastical, wrought without any necessity, and serving to no wise end, that they are so far from giving credit to their doctrines, that they are a mighty scandal to them, and to our common Christianity; whereas the truly divine miracles, reported to us in Scripture, how unlike are they to these?[1]

Middleton's 1729 publication, A Letter from Rome, presented the case against the doctrines and miracles of the Roman Church as scientifically as any work which had yet appeared. His publication was a historical study based on both research and experience. He had gathered material for it while touring Italy. He declared that if any miracles such as the Church of Rome claims had been performed, the Devil had been behind them, "endeavouring by such delusions to draw men away from the worship of the true God."[2] An examination of the purposes of the Papal miracles reveals

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1. John Tillotson, The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson(London: Printed for C. Hitch, et. al., 1757), IX, 338.

2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, V, 72.

that either wicked spirits or wicked men had performed them for wicked purposes.

Among other divines who agreed with him was William Warburton (1698-1779), who held, with reservations about the period previous to the third century, that, "The light of Miracles was surrounded by such a swarm of Monkish Fables, as darkened the brightest of its rays; so that nothing but the Force of its divine extraction, could ever have broken through them."[1] Most contemporary eighteenth-century theologians agreed.

Middleton was convinced that the entrenched rationalists were not looking at the facts consistently. He insisted that the immediate post-Apostolic miracles are to be discriminated against for the same reasons that the later Roman Catholic ones are. They resemble each other. The excuses given for the continuation of the one are no better than for the other, and the reasons for disbelieving the one are valid for disbelieving the other.

An examination of the traditional view in the eighteenth century on how long miracles had continued shows how correct Middleton's observations were, and why he was justified in contradicting the position subscribed to by most theologians.

The traditional view was influenced by the definition of a miracle. A miracle being an extraordinary interposition of supernatural power, whether by the direct or delegated power of God, and serving to confirm a divine doctrine and recommend the person delivering it, most theologians considered it reasonable to expect genuine ones in the ages after the

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1. William Warburton, Julian(London: Printed for J. and P. Knapton, 1750), p. 285.

Apostles.

This position had been put forth, with slight variations, by orthodox churchmen in the seventeenth century. Archbishop Tillotson subscribed to it. He insisted that the closing verses of Mark's Gospel and the Fathers' testimonies are collateral evidences on continuing miracles, and that there are other reasons for believing that they had continued. They had served Christianity in the following ways:

> . . . to recommend it to the esteem and liking of mankind. . . to give credit to a new doctrine and religion, so contrary to the inveterate prejudices of men, bred up in another religion very different from this, and so opposite to the lusts and interests of men; to make way for the more speedy and effectual planting of this religion in the world; to strengthen the hands of the first publishers of it, and to give credit to their testimony, concerning that strange relation of theirs, of the resurrection of Christ from the dead: to be a sensible evidence and conviction to men, of the divinity of that new doctrine which was preached unto them, and to support and confirm them in the belief and profession of it, against those terrible sufferings and persecutions, which, for the sake of it, they were exposed to.[1]

The argument continues that the advantages extended to Christianity by Constantine's imperial edicts in the years 311 and 313, and his becoming sole Emperor in 324, ended the need for extraordinary interposition. Besides, the earlier ages had so carefully preserved and transmitted the record of the Apostolic and early ecclesiastical miracles that the later ages had no need of such direct evidence as a miracle itself. The miraculous powers gradually ceased, the gift of tongues going first, the power of casting out devils last. Tillotson speaks the opinion of most of Middleton's contemporaries when he says:

> And now, that the kingdoms of the world were become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, and that the Gospel was planted, and had taken firm root, and was fully settled and es-

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1. Tillotson, op. cit., p. 356.

> tablished, these miraculous powers, which were at first necessary, to balance the mighty difficulties and oppositions which Christianity met withal, and to supply the want of all manner of countenance from the civil authority were withdrawn and did cease, because there was no need of their longer continuance.[1]

The senior Henry Dodwell(1641-1711) also speaks of continuing miracles in his dissertations on Irenaeus:

> . . . nec desunt proba & bonae fidei Testimonia unde discimus diuturniora illis temporibus in Ecclesiis fuisse Miracula. Promissio illa certe Domini S. Marc. XVI. 17,18. de Signis quae credentes secultura, de ejiciendis viz. Daemoniis, de Donis Linguarum, de rebus venenatis sine noxa percipiendis, de sanandis agris, ad Discipulos Αὐτοπλῶν , primae nimirum Successionis Fideles, quam ad ipsos referenda videntur Αὐτόπλας .[2]

Church historians propagated the traditional view. Jeremy Collier(1650-1726) says, "To suppose there are no miracles but those in the Bible, is to believe too little."[3] John Jortin(1698-1770) is more discriminating. It could be that he was influenced by Middleton, since his work was published shortly after the Free Inquiry. He accepts most of the miracles till the first decade of the second century, but from 107 A.D. until the time of Constantine he is cautious. From Constantine's time on, he has no doubts:

> After Constantine, the Miracles become extremely suspicious, both from their own frivolous or extravagant nature, or their apparent bad tendency, or many other circumstances, which I shall not here examine. I mean not by this that Providence never interposed in behalf of the Christian Cause. The defeat of Julian's attempt to rebuild the temple may justly be ascribed to a particular Providence.[4]

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1. Ibid., p. 357.

2. Henry Dodwell, Dissertationes in Irenaeum(Oxoniae: E. Theatro Sheldoniano, 1689), sec. xxviii, 141.

3. Jeremy Collier, An Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain (London: Printed for William Straker, 1852), I, 52.

4. John Jortin, Discourses Concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion: and Remarks on Ecclesiastical History(London: Printed for John White by Richard Taylor and Co., 1805), II, 28.

The English theologians were in almost unanimous agreement, then, that the genuine miracles had lasted until the time of Constantine. This was the position of, among others, Joseph Addison(1672-1719),[1] Daniel Waterland(1683-1746),[2] and William Warburton.[3]

William Whiston(1667-1752), a Cambridge University mathematics professor, agreed with the traditional position that the miraculous powers had continued, but he offered a peculiar theory on the reason for, and the time of, their cessation. In a 1728 publication, An Account of the Exact Time When Miraculous Gifts Ceased in the Church, he examined the evidence on the exorcising of demons. He says that if we look into the testimonies of Eusebius and Chrysostom, "We learn, that not only these supernatural Powers continued till after the Middle of the fourth Century, but we learn also, at what Time of that Century exactly they left the Church; i. e., just at, or after the second General Council, that of Constantinople."[4] He holds that after this meeting in 383 A.D., when the Church became Athanasian, it also became antichristian. Satan then usurped the miraculous powers. With the adoption of the Athanasian heresy of the Trinity, Popery commenced. Arguing that Jesus had made a promise of indefinitely continuing miraculous powers, he puts forward the theory that they will be restored as soon as the Church abandons the Athanasian position.

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1. Joseph Addison, The Evidences of the Christian Religion with Additional Discourses (Edinburgh: Printed for P. Hill, et. al., 1815), cf. pp. 47-56.

2. Daniel Waterland, The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity (2d ed.,London: Printed for W. Innys and R. Manby,1734), cf.p.382.

3. William Warburton, The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated (10th ed., revised, London: Printed for Thomas Tegg, 1846), III, cf.p.421.

4. William Whiston, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. William Whiston (London: Printed for the Author, 1749), Part ii, 7.

A minority of Protestant opinion deviated farther than Whiston from the traditional position. Middleton notes these deviations in the Introductory Discourse. Though a minority, the authorities are by no means insignificant.

Examining the writings of William Chillingworth(1602-1644),Middleton contends that this noted divine of the seventeenth century supports the position that the miraculous powers had ceased upon the deaths of the Apostles. Analyzing the motives behind his conversion to the Church of Rome, Chillingworth discusses his temporary conviction that supernatural and divine miracles confirm Roman Catholic doctrine and refute Reformed theology. Reviewing his conviction, he came to the conclusion that the miracles of Rome show no resemblance to the Gospel ones. The latter support the Protestant Faith, and, "for number and glory outshine the popish pretended miracles, as much as the sun doth an ignis fatuus."[1] He adds, "It seems to me no strange thing, that God in his justice should permit some true miracles to be wrought to delude them, who have forged so many, as apparently the professors of the Roman Church have, to amuse the world."[2] This evidence satisfies Middleton that Chillingworth disbelieves in miracles continuing after the times of the Apostles.

In addition to Chillingworth, Middleton claims John Locke(1632-1704) on his side. Locke's Third Letter on toleration deals with whether the Christian Religion in the first ages of the Church made progress by its own beauty, force, and reasonableness, or whether it needed the support of civil powers. Contending with an opponent, who maintains that the Church needed miracles to support it till the civil rulers were converted, Locke argues that it is not clear from Jesus's teachings that the miraculous

1. William Chillingworth, Works(12th ed., London: Bradbury and Evans for B. Blake, 1836), p. 7.

2. Ibid., p. 23.

powers were to continue under those circumstances and for those purposes. To say that miracles continued because the religion being confirmed by them was not yet being supported by the civil powers is to be too arbitrary with the use of the authority of the State. He argues:

> If then, from the times of the Apostles, the Christian religion has had sufficient evidence that it is the true religion, and men did their duty, i.e., receive it, it would certainly have subsisted and prevailed, even from the Apostles' times, without any extraordinary assistance, and then miracles after that were not necessary.[1]

The statement most helpful to Middleton appears in an argument over Primitive testimony. Locke criticizes his opponent for being too careless in his analysis of testimony. The most revered Fathers of the Church, he points out, testify that miracles had continued till the end of the fourth century, or long after Constantine had proclaimed Christianity the Religion of the Empire. If this testimony is valid, why then were miracles necessary, "unless they were to supply the want of what was not wanting; and therefore they were continued for some other end?"[2] He will leave his opponent to judge the Fathers' testimonies, but he insists:

> . . . he who will build his faith or reasonings upon miracles delivered by church-historians, will find cause to go no farther than the Apostles' time, or else not to stop at Constantine's: since the writers after that period, whose word we readily take as unquestionable in other things, speak of miracles in their time, with no less assurance than the fathers before the fourth century; and a great part of the miracles of the second and third centuries stand upon the credit of the writers of the fourth. So that that sort of argument which takes and rejects the testimony of the ancients at pleasure, as may best suit with it, will not have much force with those who are not disposed to embrace the hypothesis without any arguments at all.[3]

It is not clear from the statements of either Chillingworth or Locke that they take the position Middleton maintains. They do not dis-

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1. John Locke, Four Letters on Toleration (7th ed., London: Alexander Murray, 1870), p. 317.

2. Ibid., p. 312. 3. Ibid., pp. 312 f.

claim genuine miracles after the deaths of the Apostles. Though he seems unwilling to accept the Fathers' testimony prima facie, Locke does not discredit it so much as he criticizes his critic's misuse of it.

In addition to Chillingworth and Locke, Middleton believes that Charles Leslie(1581-1648) holds a position which parallels his. When Leslie applies the four rules of his Short and Easy Method with the Deists to the miracles of the Church of Rome, he arrives at the conclusion that they are "pious cheats, the sorest disgraces of Christianity; and which have bid the fairest of any one contrivance to overturn the certainty of the miracles of Christ and His Apostles, and the whole truth of the Gospel, by putting them all upon the same foot."[1]

As in his use of Chillingworth and Locke, Middleton takes a thread of Leslie's argument and makes it represent the whole fabric. He equates the author's "pious cheats" and "sorest disgraces of Christianity" with all the ecclesiastical miracles claimed after the times of Jesus and His Apostles, but there is no indication that Leslie classifies the immediate post-Apostolic miracles in a category with the later ones.

Before the publication of Middleton's writings, then, few English theologians questioned the traditional view that the genuine miraculous powers had continued after the times of the Apostles, that they had gradually ceased, and that they were not needed after Constantine's edicts.

This position, as Middleton tried to point out in the eighteenth century, and as B. B. Warfield has pointed out in the twentieth, is an unscientific product of rationalism. It reveals, in Warfield's words, "the curious power which preconceived theory has to blind men to facts."[2]

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1. Charles Leslie, A Short and Easy Method with the Deists(Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1697), p. 33.

2. Benjamin B. Warfield, Counterfeit Miracles(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 21.

As has already been mentioned, and as will be discussed more fully later, a preconceived theory of the function of the Apostolic and post-Apostolic miracles partly influenced Middleton's conclusion on how long they had continued. Nevertheless, his conclusion had more basis in fact and was more scientifically arrived at than were the conclusions of his critics, his predecessors, or his immediate successors.

3. The Immediate Reaction

Shortly after the publication of his Free Inquiry, Middleton observed that the immediate reaction to his undertaking was favorable. Evaluating the reception which his work had had at the University of Cambridge, he was surprised. He noted in a letter to a friend, "It spread a general persuasion of the truth which I affirm in it, and what is still less to be expected in such a place as this, without giving any sort of offense by any part of it, which has been yet taken notice of."[1] Of course, he adds parenthetically, there are always those cautious people, "who effect a reserve and silence on subjects of this kind, till they are instructed from abroad in what manner they ought to treat them."[2]

The favorable reaction was neither long-lived nor extensive. The only person who defended him at any length was Frederick Toll(dates unknown), a rector at Dogmersfield, Hampshire. Replying to William Dodwell's Free Answer to Middleton, he combined quibbling, repetition, and common sense so inartfully and unoriginally, that his work was more detrimental than helpful. Besides a superficial letter by a Richard Yate, and certain other brief, ambiguous, and half-hearted references, there was little else

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 418.
2. Ibid., p. 418.

published in support of the views advanced in the Free Inquiry

Most of the reaction was against Middleton's conclusions and the method by which he had reached them. Among those who briefly criticized him were: William Parker(1714-1802), in a sermon preached at Oxford; Abraham LeMoyne(d. 1757), in a postscript to a treatise on miracles; and John Chapman(1704-1784), in a charge he gave to the clergy of his Archdeaconry at Sudbury. The traditional rebuttal centered on the argument that miracles had continued because they had been promised and because they had served a need. With the majority of the orthodox theologians, the rational arguments for the miracles made a strong case for the testimony, instead of the testimony making a strong case for the facts.

William Whiston was convinced that Middleton's work had reached a ridiculous degree of scepticism, that the Free Inquiry had miscarried in its purpose, and that it supported his own position:

> [The Free Inquiry] seems to me . . . to be the strongest Demonstration of the Continuance of miraculous Gifts till the Council of Constantinople that could possibly be expected. For while one so able and willing has not been able, with his utmost Search, to find one single Testimony or the least real Evidence against their Continuance, the most full and most numerous Testimonies already refer'd [sic] to, especially as joined to our Saviour's own Prediction for their Continuance, cannot but be look'd [sic] upon as the strongest Evidence on their side, and indeed plainly undeniable.[1]

Thomas Church(1707-1756) presented a lengthy reply to Middleton, in which he argued on the same basis as Whiston and the orthodox theologians: that the miraculous powers were promised by Jesus, that they were needed, and that to deny the testimony which the Fathers give is to destroy a faith in their judgment. Church considered it "sufficient to confute the Inquiry, if the Claims of the earlier Ages be made

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1. Whiston, op. cit., p. 39.

good."[1]

Besides Church, William Dodwell(1709-1785)(a son of Henry) and Zechariah Brooke(1716-1788) offered the most extended answers to Middleton. They likewise contended for the necessity of miracles continuing, and they argued against him, that the Apostolic Fathers are not silent on continuing miraculous powers and that unquestionable witnesses attest to extraordinary facts which are credible.

Dodwell presented his rebuttal in two publications. The first was a Free Answer, and the second was a longer work replying to Toll's attack on the first. (Middleton died before the publication of the latter.) He urges caution in approaching the miracles of the Primitive Church, lest discredit be brought upon the Apostolic ones. He admits that Middleton's position--wrong though it may be--considered simply and independently does no appreciable damage to the Gospel. The greatest damage done is in the discrediting of the Fathers' testimony, for to disbelieve them is to destroy a part of the foundation of Christianity:

> . . . when we view the Thing as it stands in its present Circumstances; when we consider that the same Fathers, who bear Witness to the Genuineness of the Gospels, attest also strongly and uniformly, that Miracles were continued in their Times; if it should appear that They deceive Us in this Point, This must necessarily give Room to suspect that They might also deceive Us in other Points.[2]

It is obvious that Dodwell is more alarmed over consequences than he is concerned with facing facts.

Brooke also feared the consequences of adopting Middleton's method

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1. Thomas Church, A Vindication of the Miraculous Powers, Which Subsisted in the Three First Centuries of the Christian Church (London: J. & J. Rivington, 1750), p. 4.

2. William Dodwell, A Full and Final Reply to Mr. Toll's Defence of Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry (London, Printed for S. Birt, 1751), p. lxviii.

and conclusions. Insinuating in his Preface that the approach of the Free Inquiry is dangerous, he announces that he will abandon all the subtleties of modern controversial methods for the plain, simple, humble, mild, commendable candor which the nature of the subject requires and which Christianity commands. He accuses Middleton of being scurrilous in dealing with the Fathers. Like Dodwell, his conclusion after reading the Introductory Discourse was that the consequences of agreeing with Middleton would be "dangerous to Christianity, ruinous to the faith of History, and introductive of an universal scepticism."[1]

To him the presumptive and positive evidences for continuing miraculous powers are so numerous, unexceptionable, and reliable that they establish the credibility of the facts and the witnesses. In addition to the testimony which both the writings and lives of the Fathers give, and in addition to the testimony of Scripture, the necessity and value of the extraordinary gifts conclude that they continued. Contrary to what Middleton says, this position does not necessitate accepting the miracles of Rome:

> A man therefore may now safely defend the authority of the Earlier Fathers. . . and consistently maintain upon their authority and the force of those principles. . . that Miraculous Powers did continue in the Church, after the days of the Apostles; without affording any grounds to the pretensions of the Popish Miracles, or furnishing any cause of umbrage to the present government; since there is a manifest and wide difference discoverable between the credibility of those Miracles, recorded by the Earlier Writers of the Church, and the credibility of those Miracles, which are reported by the Popish Writers; and since a firm and zealous adherence to Protestant principles is the most effectual way to defend and secure our happy Establishment.[2]

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1. Zechariah Brooke, An Examination of Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry Into the Miraculous Powers of the Primitive Church (Cambridge: J. Bentham, 1750), p. xx.

2. Ibid., p. 454.

The rebuttal to Middleton, of which the above are typical examples, was puny and ineffective. Since the testimony on the post-Apostolic miracles was at first scant and ambiguous, and since it soon became embarrassingly abundant and increasingly similar to the later Roman Catholic testimony, the defendants of continuing miracles had to strain their arguments in order to validate the earlier ones by principles which would not give credit to the later ones. The discussion often became thin. The principal objections were opinions rather than scientifically calculated conclusions. Inconclusive conjecture substituted for evidence. Meanings and conclusions were guessed at, and applications which Middleton had not suggested were made. He had insisted that his conclusions on the testimony with which he had dealt do not apply to the miracles of the Bible. However, his suggestion that the same principles apply for measuring the credibility of the facts of any age received more attention than his warning, and his reasons for not applying his conclusions to the Apostolic miracles were ignored.

The rebuttal to Middleton is indicative of the degree of interest British theologians were showing in creative theological discussion in the middle of the eighteenth century. One of them, William Warburton, recorded this observation:

> Don't you remember I predicted to you what would be the fortune of Dr. Middleton's posthumous works, unless the town had them like their mackerel, while their mouths were just in relish? They have not waited long; yet Manby tells me he has not sold three hundred of the separate volumes in which they are contained. And yet these are as well written as anything he published himself.[1]

As will be presently shown, rationalism had anesthetized interest in

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1. William Warburton, Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to One of His Friends (2d ed., London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809), p. 110.

theological controversy. Creative energies were being attracted to politics and economics.

The value of the controversy being considered, therefore, as mentioned before, derives not so much from the sterile rebuttal to Middleton's publications, as from the recognition which he gave to the empirical and scientific study of historical records.

CHAPTER II

CONTROVERSY AND ORTHODOXY

1. Theological Discussion in England Before the Middle of the Eighteenth Century
   (1.) The Entrenchment of Rationalism
   (2.) The Progress of Science
   (3.) The Political Action for Toleration
   (4.) The Emergence of Reasonable Christianity and the Shadows of Deism
2. Middleton's Contribution to the Theological Discussion
   (1.) The Need of a Free Inquiry and His Ability To Do It
   (2.) His Reasons for Undertaking It

Middleton's writings appeared at a time when the theological discussion among the English theologians had been confined within a rather well-defined area. The discussion had covered the course from the internal evidence of Christianity, to the external evidence, to the credibility of the testimony, to the reliability of the witnesses. On the surface, the direct evidence seemed undamaged. What waited to be exposed was the testimony of Church History, and Middleton was ready, and felt able, to examine it.

This chapter will attempt to show how half a century of theological discussion both prepared for and obstructed his investigations, and how certain professional and personal motivations promted him. The material is background and could be skipped by the reader without missing any logical steps in the development of the thesis.

1. Theological Discussion in England Before the Middle of the Eighteenth Century

(1.) The Entrenchment of Rationalism

The entrenchment of rationalism was undoubtedly the most prominent feature of theological discussion in England in the eighteenth century. The Age of Reason, with its product, reasonable Christianity, had been conceived late in the seventeenth century, when, it is generally agreed, modern philosophy began to make its appearance.

Prominently responsible for the penetration of rationalism into theology were the Cambridge Platonists, a group of theologians in the seventeenth century connected with the University whose name they bear. One of their primary concerns was the proper authority in religious matters. Opposed to rigid ecclesiastical authority, such as the Church of Rome exercised or such as Archbishop Laud and his followers in the Established Church advocated, and equally opposed to the rigid dogmatism of the Calvinistic Puritans, they offered the human reason as a reliable authority. It, they argued, is a spark of the divine light, and, enlightened by the Spirit of God, both illuminates and dictates to the conscience. They saw no conflict between its dictates and the decisions of conscience; nor did they see any conflict between reason and faith. As Cragg points out in his comments on the rationalism of this school of theologians, "Religion is committed to the honoring of reason, and reason enlightens the material of faith."[1]

Another group of rationalizing divines was the Latitudinarians. Like the Cambridge Platonists, they consistently referred all religious matters to the judgment of reason. But unlike certain of the former, they distrusted any claims to private enlightenment. Revelation is essential

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1. G. R. Cragg, From Puritanism to the Age of Reason (Cambridge: The University Press, 1950), p. 44.

to the Christian Faith, they stressed; a special revelation has given the substance of the Creed, and adequate objective evidences verify it.

Although they held that the external evidences of the Christian Revelation are exceptional, they nevertheless insisted upon proving the reasonableness of every argument in behalf of religion. Where reason could not demonstrate the truth of the Christian Faith, the Latitudinarians adopted the rule, in the words of Abbey and Overton, "Don't tread too far with reason, believe and accept."[1]

As influential as anybody in the penetration of rationalism into theology was John Locke. Lecky makes this comment on his contribution:

> Locke taught the necessity of mapping out the limits of human faculties, and by his doctrine concerning innate ideas, and above all by his masterly analysis of Enthusiasm, he gave the deathblow to the opinions of those who would remove a certain class of mental phenomena altogether from the jurisdiction of the reason.[2]

This development in theology raised the question as to the authority of Scripture. William Chillingworth struggled with this matter. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he had had personal experience with the authority of Rome. Discarding that Faith and the supremacy of ecclesiastical authority, he called for a return to first principles. His position is summed up in the maxim: The Bible is the religion of Protestants. Except in cases of confusion over the meaning, Scripture is to be the rule and standard for Christian thought. He allows reservations:

> As for the impossibility of Scripture being the sole judge of controversies, that is, the sole rule for men to judge them by (for we mean nothing else), . . . I cannot but desire you to tell

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1. Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, The English Church in the Eighteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887), p. 146.

2. William Edward Hartpole Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth Century (New ed., London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892) I,403.

> me, if Scripture cannot be the judge of any controversy, how shall that touching the church and the notes of it be determined? And if it be the sole judge of this one, why may it not of others? Why not of all? Those only excepted wherein the Scripture itself is the subject of the questions, which cannot be determined but by natural reason, the only principle, besides Scripture, which is common to all Christians.[1]

The English theologians of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century were convinced of the ability of the human reason, and they sensed no inconsistency in accepting it and supernatural revelation as equal authorities in theology. The problem later theologians would have to resolve was how important the reasoning powers are in deciding doctrinal matters.

(2.) The Progress of Science

In addition to rationalism, the progress of science also affected theological discussion. Previous to the seventeenth century, scientific research had been impeded by too strict a reliance on scholastic authority. The scholastic presuppositions with regard to the natural world had been accepted uncritically.

The increasing credence given to the findings of Copernicus and Galileo encouraged the repudiation of scholasticism. Newton(1642-1727) was also beginning to receive attention. Dissatisfaction with the prevailing scientific systems prompted further experimentation. The new scientific method was on its way to recognition.

The repudiation of the content and methods of scholastic science in favor of the new science affected other scholastic systems. Aristotle was no longer held in religious esteem. Augustine ceased to be revered as an unquestionable authority. As science discovered new laws or offered

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1. William Chillingworth, The Religion of Protestants(London: Henry G. Bohn, 1846), p. 92.

natural explanations of existing ones, belief in the supernatural and in first causes was affected.

The first reaction of the theologians to scientific progress was either to rationalize the truths of Scripture in harmony with the findings or to ignore them. Cragg makes this statement on the effects of scientific discoveries at the close of the seventeenth century: "Our period ends with the curious spectacle of men who accepted with no sense of incongruity the ancient stories of Genesis and the recent discoveries of Newton."[1]

The scientific progress disturbed some theologians, however. Certain of them were suspicious of both the findings and the methods of the scientists; they feared that science might establish itself as an incompatible and alternative method of discovering the truth which they alone felt privileged to systematize, and they were apprehensive of what the discoveries could do to the traditional beliefs. They therefore put forth apologetics designed to correlate the findings of Newton and the truths of the Bible.

Their fears and efforts were superfluous. The scientists for the most part remained loyal to the authority of the Scriptures, and to the theory that a miracle is extraordinary and serves as an evidence of a revelation. Yet, as Cragg remarks, "In the case of both these subjects [the authority of Scripture and the nature and purpose of a miracle] the scientists introduced slight modifications, which, though apparently leaving the substance of belief unaltered, opened the door to a demand for serious change."[2]

The demand did not immediately effect serious changes in the fundamental beliefs. The tendency was to restate them in traditional terms.

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1. Cragg, op. cit., p. 229.

2. Ibid., p. 111.

(3.) The Political Action for Toleration

Another influence on early eighteenth-century thought in England was political. The Government legislated for religious toleration.

The necessity of extending toleration had become obvious during the first years after the Restoration. The English divines recognized that legislation could encourage division and dissension in the Church, but they also realized that regimentation and persecution were undesirable and ineffective in regulating existing dissension.

The pulpit, the press, and the changing intellectual climate after the middle of the seventeenth century prodded the legislative processes. William Penn(1644-1718), Thomas Burnet(1635-1715), Bishop Edward Stillingfleet(1635-99), and John Locke were outspoken on toleration. Also the Cambridge Platonists contributed to the changed intellectual outlook. Their stress on individual responsibility created a situation in which the granting of toleration could not be delayed. Besides, the intensity of religious feeling had declined, and the zeal for persecution had subsided.

The Act of Toleration was passed on May 24, 1669. It stipulated that a dissenter had to sign an oath of allegiance and supremacy, had to declare himself against transubstantiation, and had to be a believer in the Trinity. Roman Catholics, therefore, and anti-Trinitarians were excluded from its benefits. The toleration which the Act created, thus, was not absolute. But a new attitude toward religious liberty and free-thinking soon developed.

(4.) The Emergence of Reasonable Christianity and the Shadows of Deism

As they became more confident of the ability of the reason and more convinced of its authority, the English Churchmen encouraged the

emergence of reasonable Christianity. Archbishop Tillotson and John Locke are the two seventeenth-century theologians who expounded it and were largely responsible for its penetration into early eighteenth-century thought. Locke argued that the reason and revelation are the means by which the knowledge of God and truth are attained. The Christian revelation supports the fact that God gives to the reason, which is the last judge and guide in everything, the empirical marks by which to know whether to assent to certain truths and propositions:

> Thus we see, the holy men of old, who had revelations from God, had something else besides the internal light of assurance in their own minds to testify to them that it was from God. They were not left to their own persuasions alone, that those persuasions were from God, but had outward signs to convince them of the Author of those revelations. And when they were to convince others they had a power given them to justify the truth of their commission from heaven, and by visible signs to assert the divine authority of a message they were sent with.[1]

As the shadows of deism fell across reasonable Christianity, it began to assume a likeness to reasonable religion. Lord Herbert (1583-1648), the father of English deism, conceived this likeness when early in the seventeenth century he formed a creed of universal belief which, he said, was the natural religion of primitive man. On the other hand, Tillotson and Locke, in addition to emphasizing the reasonableness of the Christian doctrines, stressed also the necessity of a special revelation.

John Toland(1670-1722) and Matthew Tindall(1657-1733) stretched the shadows of deism over reasonable Christianity when they produced their unorthodox attacks on the orthodox claim that Christianity is a special revelation. The thesis of Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious, published in 1696, is:

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1. John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding(New ed., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1924), p. 596.

> . . . that Reason is the only Foundation of all Certitude; and that nothing reveal'd [sic], whether as to its Manner or Existence, is more exempted from its Disquisitions, than the ordinary Phenomena of Nature. Wherefore, we likewise maintain, according to the title of this Discourse, that there is Nothing in the Gospel, contrary to Reason nor above it; and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd [sic] a Mystery.[1]

Tindal's Christianity as Old as the Creation, published in 1730, challenged the argument that a special revelation is necessary and that the Christian Religion is unique. His proposition is that natural religion has from the beginning of time contained all the precepts and duties necessary for man, that natural reason is able to discover these truths, and that it discovers Christianity to be the perfect original religion.

One of the first and most influential, but not most adequate, replies to the deists was Charles Leslie's A Short and Easy Method with the Deists(1697). He proposed that the truth of the doctrines of Christianity depends on the truth of the matters-of-fact recorded of Jesus in the Gospels: "For His miracles, if true, do vouch the truth of what He delivered."[2] He listed four rules by which to test the reality of such a matter-of-fact as a miracle. The rules state that it must be objective and observable, that it must be done publicly, that actions must result as monuments to it, and that such monuments, actions, and observances must begin from the time it happened. These rules support the Christian miracles, but no other religion has miracles which can meet the test.

Two works which challenged the orthodox position on the Christian evidences were Anthony Collin's A Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion(1724), and Thomas Woolston's Discourses on Jesus's Miracles, the first of which was published in 1727. With these publications the serious attacks on the Christian miracles began. Collin's argument is

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1. John Toland, Christianity Not Mysterious(2d ed., London: Printed for Sam. Buckley, 1696), p. 6.

2. Leslie, op. cit., p. 5.

that prophecy is superior to miracles as the evidence of Christianity:

> They [the prophecies] are perpetual and standing miracles, and do not disappear, like other miracles on their performance. and how much short of such plain miraculous evidence, as are prophecies, recorded before the events foretold, and fulfill'd, [sic] must be any reports of miracles, whereof men in all ages and countrys [sic] have generally been the inventors.[1]

Woolston attempted to show that a literal interpretation makes Jesus's miracles look ridiculous, and that they are not evidences of the Messianic mission. Discussing a controversy over Jesus's Messiahship, he says, "I believe this Controversy will end in the absolute Demonstration of Jesus's Messiahship from Prophecy, which is the only way to prove him to be the Messiah."[2]

The replies to Collins and Woolston followed a pattern which Tillotson had outlined, posing the Resurrection as the archetype and guarantee of the Christian miracles. Thomas Sherlock(1678-1761) presented a Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus to develop his argument that a revelation is the best foundation of a religion, that the Resurrection verifies the Christian Revelation, that credible testimony establishes the Resurrection, and that it is the index of Jesus's miraculous powers. He argues:

> . . . a resurrection considered only as a fact to be proved by evidence, is a plain case; it requires no greater ability in the witnesses, than that they be able to distinguish between a man dead, and a man alive; a point in which I believe every man living thinks himself a judge.[3]

The witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus had this ability. In addition,

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1. Anthony Collins, A Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion (London: 1724), p. 323.

2. Thomas Woolston, A Discourse on the Miracles of Our Saviour (London: Printed for the Author, 1711), p. 1.

3. Thomas Sherlock, Proofs of Christianity: The Trial of the Witnesses (Edinburgh: Printed by J. Robertson for W. Gray, 1769), p. 67.

they persevered in the truth of their belief, even in the face of death, and their successors received powers similar to theirs.

At the close of the deistic controversy, Peter Annet(1693-1769) and the second Henry Dodwell(?-1784) wrote works discrediting the external evidences. The former published a series of tracts brutally attacking the Christian miracles. He argued that sensory experience is unreliable, as is also the testimony of "those Strangers that Party and Interest only make to be authentic."[1] The witnesses of the Christian miracles forged what they say they had experienced, and they are incoherent in their testimony. He summarizes:

> 'Tis also strange it should be conceived that Proofs can be drawn from the Miracles of Christ, seeing the Evangelists themselves betray this Information to us, that the Jews were not convinced of any Miracles done by him; and that the Evidence of His Resurrection has upon the strictest Examination appeared by Invincible Proof Insufficient to convince any partial Enquirer.[2]

Since he cannot be certain that the sacred writings are the productions of the persons whose names they bear, he will trust to the evidence of reason alone: "Reason is more fit to direct Men's judgments right, than works of Wonder; which tho' they make a Mob gape and stare, do not give them rational Faculties."[3] The Resurrection is a case in which the evidence is deficient and in which true faith rejects the sensory in favor of the rational evidence:

> 'Tis true indeed, that the Evidence of the Three Appearances of Jesus shews [sic], that there is no Agreement in the first, no Certainty in the second, and no Harmony in the third: When then! Such Inconsistencies, Improbabilities, Absurdities, and Contradictions, would destroy the Credit of other History,but

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1. Peter Annet, "Supernaturals Examined," A Collection of Tracts of a Certain Free Inquirer Noted by His Sufferings for His Opinions(London: Printed for the Author by F. Page, et. al., 1739-1745), p. 140.

2. Annet,"The History and Character of St. Paul Examined," ibid., pp. 33 f.

3. Annet, "Supernaturals Examined, " ibid., p. 133.

the Faith of this is founded on a Rock: the Rock of Education, which Reason cannot penetrate.[1]

Dodwell, a son of the seventeenth-century divine, and a brother of Middleton's assailant, William, in his Christianity Not Founded on Argument (1742-3), discredited the evidential value of the Scriptural miracles and the testimony on them. He held that miracles are the natural effects of doctrines, and, therefore, they serve no religious proof-value. They fail to produce the instantaneous effect which the truth of a doctrine should produce in a believer's mind.

Again, human testimony contributes no authority to a miracle, because, "The testimony of sight is, by its Nature, an Evidence not to be communicated; all the Assurance in the world of another's seeing, can never have an equal Effect upon my Sense or make me see a Thing where I was not actually present."[2] Testimony is evidence of a miracle only while it is being performed. The moment an eyewitness attempts to relate his experience he extinguishes the light of conviction.

Nor are the Scriptures a reliable source of revealed doctrine. He warns against "resting the terms of our Salvation upon a writing that must run the common hazards of all other Memorials of the kind."[3] Though continuing miracles had guarded the Scriptures from the pitfalls which have damaged other compositions, the sacred writings would still be an inadequate revelation of doctrinal truth. The only reliable evidence of the Christian Faith is the Holy Spirit, the active Interpreter, who overcomes any deficiencies of external evidences: "Here is pointed out to us at once that great Dictator and infallible Guide which we have been seeking for, and indeed the only

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1. Annet, "The Resurrection of Jesus Considered," ibid., p. 301.

2. Henry Dodwell, Christianity Not Founded on Argument (3d ed., London: Printed for M. Cooper, 1743), p. 52.

3. Ibid., p. 61.

Character we can possibly think of any way equal to such Providence."[1]

Gilbert West(1703-1756), and George Lyttelton(1709-1773) attempted to meet Annet's assaults, and Philip Doddridge(1702-1751) replied to Henry Dodwell. Like those who attacked Collins and Woolston, West defends the Christian miracles on the basis of the credibility of the Resurrection. Such evidence and other circumstances establish it as "must be allowed to have been sufficient to prove any Event, that was not either impossible or improbable in the highest Degree."[2] Lyttelton uses the conversion of Paul in defense of Christianity as a special revelation. He argues that Paul was not an impostor, and that what happened to him and what he did, said, and wrote are proofs of Christianity. To sum up, the witnesses of the Christian miracles had reliable sensory experiences, they stated their experiences simply, the testimony is satisfactory, apparent contradictions in the testimony can be easily explained, and above all, the witnesses are to be credited because of their devotion to their cause in the face of danger and death. For Lyttelton and West, as for most eighteenth-century divines, rational arguments sufficed to determine the credibility of the extraordinary testimony on Christianity.

In replying to Henry Dodwell, Philip Doddridge followed the lines of thought which his orthodox predecessors had already staked out. He presupposes what is to be proved: "Allowing the New Testament to be genuine, it will certainly follow, that Christianity is a divine revelation."[3] The witnesses of Christianity are reliable because of their character, because they had no reason to deceive, because of the way in which they have

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1. Ibid., p. 56.

2. Gilbert West, Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (3d ed., London: Printed for R. Dodsley, 1747), p. 295.

3. Philip Doddridge, The Evidences of Christianity (Edinburgh: H. S. Baynes and Co., 1823), p. 45.

written, and because their writings reveal traces of a plain, honest, pious, and generous disposition.

The orthodox staked their success in silencing the deists on these arguments. They considered that the rock of reasonable orthodoxy and common sense had crushed deism. The Christian Faith stood on the immovable foundation of a reasonable revelation, supported by irrefutable evidences.

In spite of the orthodox theologians' satisfaction, the deistic controversy dissipated without a satisfactory answer to the charges against the Scripture records of forgery and imposture. The defenders of reasonable Christianity failed to close the breaches caused by the attacks on the external evidences.

A postscript to the deistic controversy was offered in the Essay of Miracles by David Hume(1711-1776). Published shortly after Middleton's Introductory Discourse, it encouraged rebuttal with which was combined criticism of Middleton.

Hume's concern is with the evidence necessary to prove a miracle. Like Middleton, he stresses the importance of experience. The following statement summarizes his thinking on the empirical evidence against a miracle:

> A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.[1]

Since uniform experience is against the occurrence of a miracle, no testimony, he argues, can prove that one has happened. The only way that testimony can prove it is if the falsehood of the fact being testified to were more miraculous than the truth which the testimony is attempting to estab-

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1. David Hume, The Philosophical Works of David Hume (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1854), IV, 130.

lish. Even in this case, true and false testimony will cancel each other, and the only degree of assurance left for a fact will depend on the force which remains for the argument after the subtraction of the inferior from the superior testimony. Experience is direct evidence and is always superior to related testimony.

The discussion that developed over Hume's essay attempted to establish two points: first, that experience is not against a miracle, and second, that reliable testimony can decide for or against one. Instead of arguing empirically, however, his critics employed the presuppositions used in the sterile discussions on miracles in the first half of the century. The critics were content to oppose his argument that the uniformity of experience is against extraordinary happenings, and they were only partly successful in pointing out what F. R. Tennant[1] and C. S. Lewis[2] have pointed out more recently, that Hume's inductive method and his theory of causality disqualify him from sincerely discussing the proof of a miracle.

The replies to Hume failed at the same point that the earlier discussions on miracles had failed. Both he and Middleton offered new methods of approaching extraordinary facts, but the orthodox theologians were too entrenched in rationalism to approach the evidence scientifically.

2. Middleton's Contribution to the Theological Discussion

(1.) The Need of a Free Inquiry and His Ability To Do It

The foregoing examination of the development of theological discussion in England in the eighteenth century makes it obvious why Middleton

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1. F. R. Tennant, Miracle and Its Philosophical Presuppositions (Cambridge: The University Press, 1925), cf. pp. 81-84.

2. C. S. Lewis, Miracles (London: Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., 1947), cf. pp. 123-128.

felt that an examination of the ecclesiastical miracles was in order. While he was only indirectly concerned with defending the Gospel miracles, he believed that an examination of the later ones would be beneficial to the Church, because, among other things, it would clear the genuine ones.

Besides these convictions, he was confident that he was capable of the undertaking. He observed that not everybody has the capacity, the leisure, or the opportunity to inquire into everything which religion requires as a matter of belief or practice, and so he undertook his inquiry as a service to the Church as well as a satisfaction to himself. He did not hesitate to avow that his objective, critical faculty was one of his chief assets for the project.

Personal circumstances and professional misfortunes both had a share in preparing him. Because of a family inheritance and a fortunate marriage, he had no lack of financial backing. He was the son of a Yorkshire rector who had private sources of income, and he married a woman who had considerable means.

His professional life is connected primarily with the University of Cambridge. He graduated there and later joined the staff. Most of his professional misfortunes originated over his disagreements with the head of the University, Richard Bentley.

The initial dispute issued from trouble over an honorary degree. In 1717 King George I had visited Cambridge and conferred upon Middleton and thirty-one others a Doctor-of-Divinity Degree. Bentley demanded a fee of four guineas from each. Middleton refused to pay. He took his case to court, where he was found guilty of libel and was forced to meet the demand. From this time on he was intent on criticizing Bentley. A few years later he managed to get back the money he had paid.

He later collaborated with others on the staff who were disgruntled over the administration of the University, and the group initiated action for removing the head administrator. In a 1719 publication of the proceedings against Bentley he quoted what a certain gentleman had said of the Master of the University: "He is one of the greatest savages these later ages have produced."[1] He added that a more perfect picture could not be drawn. In the same publication, referring to Bentley's non-attendance at chapel, he accused him of displaying a "shameful irreligious life,. . . withdrawing himself almost totally from the public worship of God."[2] Bentley, Middleton exclaimed, had a pure contempt for sacred things.

Further assassinations of Bentley's character followed Middleton's appointment in 1721 as a Protobibliothecarius. The University had created this post for him upon acquiring the library of Bishop More. Shortly after accepting the position, he accused Bentley of withholding in his private quarters the Codex Bezae Manuscripts. He made further insinuations at the dedication of the Library. This time he went too far. The University sued him, and Bentley received fifty pounds from the case. Middleton vacated his post and took a trip to Italy.

Provocative views in later publications involved him again in professional misfortune at Cambridge. Upon his return from Italy he was appointed the first Woodwardian Professor at the University. At the time he was engaged in correspondence with Daniel Waterland over Matthew Tindal's Christianity as Old as the Creation. Criticizing Waterland's objections to Tindal's views, he betrayed his disposition to consider the dogma of the literal inspiration of the Bible untenable. He attacked Waterland's apolo-

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1. Conyers Middleton, A True Account of the Present State of Trinity College in Cambridge Under the Oppressive Government of Their Master, Richard Bentley, D.D. (London: Printed for T. Bickerton, 1719), p. 7.

2. Ibid., p. 8.

getics on the Fall, insisting that an allegorical interpretation of it is a reasonable approach. A better summary of his view of the Fall is found, not in this attack, but in a later publication, An Examination of the Lord Bishop of London's Discourses Concerning the Use and Intent of Prophecy:

> I will grant it to come from Moses, and that Moses was commissioned to write it; yet this makes no difference in the case, because the matter of the story, whether it be inspired or not, is absolutely inconsistent with the character of An Historical Narration, and must ever convince all, who consider it without prejudice, that it is wholly fabulous or allegorical: and that Moses's commission was accommodated on this occasion, as it is allowed to have been on many others, to the prevailing tast [sic] and customs of the nations around him; among whom the usual method of instructing or inculcating truths, especially those of a sublime and theological kind, was by fables and allegories, which conveyed a summary notion of the doctrine proposed to be taught, by a way the most striking and entertaining to the generality of mankind.[1]

The advantage of considering the Fall a moral fable, he says, is that,

> . . . we get rid of every difficulty, render it clear and consistent, as well as adequate to every use, which Christianity can require of it: and, on the contrary, . . . the historical sense cannot be defended, but by a series of suppositions, wholly arbitrary and precarious, void of all support from the text, and evidently condemned by our reason.[2]

In other letters to Waterland, he reasserted his position that the Scriptures are not absolutely or universally inspired. The general precepts of the Christian Revelation must, and can, be supported by the evidence available, but it is not necessary to prove every text of Scripture or defend every proposition of Revelation. Instead of trying to refute Tindal by reproducing literal accounts of Scriptural events, the more effective rebuttal to the conclusions toward which his arguments point is to emphasize the foolishness of trying to supplant revealed Christianity by a religion of reason.

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, V, 280.
2. Ibid., p. 294.

Middleton then proceeds with a common-sense argument. Religion serves a useful purpose. Specifically, Christianity has proved itself in previous ages, and, being currently established by law, is a superior system of religion. In another place he says, "Some traditional religion or other must always take place, as necessary to keep the world in order."[1]

He apparently disregarded such inferences from his statements as: How much does the tenability of Christianity matter? or, Why could some other religion not serve equally well the function he assigns to Christianity? Because the consequences of his remarks to Waterland were considered dangerous, Middleton was threatened with the loss of his Cambridge degrees.

His conflicts at the University resulted in professional jealousy; he frequently criticized his colleagues. He contended, nevertheless, in a letter to Warburton, that he was not interested in preferment:

> This is my satisfaction which I feel every day in my study, in the want of all preferment; that I can live after my own way, without attending levees, and exposing myself to disappointments, or sacrificing what is of all things the most precious to a declining life, my time to a vain ambition.[2]

Yet, in other correspondence he reveals that the quiet life leaves something to be desired. In the Sixth Letter to Warburton he replies to the former's mild surprise that a certain Bishop had considered the Divine Legation the work of an enemy of the Church. He is not overwhelmed, for, "Nothing is strange from such a Bishop, who has just learning enough to make his want of sense only the more con-

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1. Ibid., III, 66. 2. Ibid., I, 404.

spicuous."[1] And the Seventh Letter contain this statement: "A stupid book against Morgan, or a defence of the Fathers, especially where they cannot be defended, are the sure means of making a man, first a chaplain, and at last perhaps an Archbishop."[2] Several other statements suggest that he is less disconcerted by the doctrinal position of certain of his colleagues than by their professional status.

The excesses of certain of his charges, the extremities of certain of his views, and a bold and affirmative disregard for the consequences of his works may be taken as indications that Middleton's professional misfortunes had strained what had been one of his best qualifications for doing the Free Inquiry, namely, his critical faculty. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether anyone else at the middle of the eighteenth century in England would have recognized the value of an undertaking such as the Free Inquiry, unless his critical outlook has been as well developed.

(2.) His Reasons for Undertaking It

Reflecting on his opportunities, his abilities, and his experiences, Middleton says in his preliminary work on the ecclesiastical miracles, that he has not only the right, but, because of the need, the duty to be critical of the Fathers' testimony. Anticipating a difference of opinion as to how true and helpful his judgments may prove to be, he insists that neither idle curiosity nor the vanity of confuting generally accepted opinions had prompted him; the duty of declaring his own had. He argues that every man has the right to judge

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1. Ibid., p. 398. 2. Ibid., p. 400.

of controversial matters. A greater variety of opinion is to be expected in matters that are more rational than empirical. Education, example, and habit bias opinions, and zeal and interest in a cause prejudice even the most honest persons. Therefore, he says that in controversial issues he does not hesitate to disagree with the traditional view. He will not be easily persuaded to indulge in controversy over his conclusions, he announces, but, "Contenting myself with the discharge of my own conscience, by this free declaration of my real sentiments, and indulging the same liberty to everybody else, I shall leave the rest to the judgment of the public."[1]

Besides feeling it his duty, Middleton says that he was motivated secondly by a lack of agreement on the exact time when genuine miraculous powers were inoperative. Discussing the traditional Protestant view that they had continued through at least the first three centuries of the Christian Era, had gradually tapered off, and eventually ceased, he observes that this view is not universally held. Several respected Protestant divines allow that genuine miracles had continued into the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Among them were Daniel Waterland, John Chapman, and William Berriman.

Contrary to the opinion of some, he insists that history offers enough light to decide the matter. Chapman was one who disagreed. He overlooks the fact, Middleton points out, that the apparatus criticus of a free inquiry applies to the Apostolic Age, as well as to the Post-Apostolic, or to any period of history and the literature produced in it.

He considers it dangerous to say that it is of no consequence how long genuine miracles had lasted. On the assumption that the

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1. Ibid., p. xxv.

testimony of the Fathers has some bearing on the doctrines and disciplines of the Church, he argues:

> . . . it must surely be of the utmost concern to know, how far it's [sic] authority may be trusted, and how far the hand of God continued to cooperate visibly with the saints of those days, by giving a divine sanction to the doctrines which they taught, and the rites, which they established.[1]

There is no reason to question Middleton's desire to settle this issue. There is reason to applaud his conviction that the information and tools necessary for determining the matter scientifically are at hand; there is reason to appreciate his acting upon his conviction.

A third motive behind Middleton's undertaking was his anxiety over the advances being made in England by Roman Catholicism. The growing influence of Popery and the increasing number of Popish books being published alarmed him. He saw Popery duping Roman Catholics, and he felt that Protestants were giving undue recognition to the worship, rites, and doctrines of the Primitive Church, the authority of which he considered "a treacherous guide to a searcher after truth."[2]

His anxiety was exaggerated. Though making a significant geographical expansion in the first part of the eighteenth century, Roman Catholicism was not attracting converts at an alarming rate in England. However, because the orthodox theologians were confused over the seat of authority and relied heavily on the voice of the Early Church, Middleton was justified in calling for a reorientation of Protestantism around a basic principle of the Reformers, namely, the authority of the Bible in determining matters of doctrine. He says:

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1. Ibid., p. xvi. 2. Ibid., V, 188.

> This is the genuine ground in which Christianity rests; the history of our Saviour's doctrine and miracles, as it is declared and comprised within the canon of the Holy Scriptures. Whenever we go beyond this, we weaken its foundation, by endeavouring to inlarge [sic] it; and by recurring to an evidence less strong and of doubtful credit, take pains onely [sic] to render a good cause suspect, and expose it to the perpetual ridicule of the sceptics and Free-Thinkers.[1]

His concern for the purity of doctrine, as much as his alarm over the Roman Catholic influence on orthodox theologians, inspired his undertaking. He envisioned his work as a means of preserving the purity of Protestant beliefs. Accepting the orthodox position that the primary purpose of a miracle is to confirm the truth of a doctrine, he at the same time cautioned that miracles have limitations as evidences of a religion. Nevertheless, he insisted that, as far as miracles can prove a religion, those of Jesus and His Apostles are satisfactory evidences of the Christian doctrines; they alone display the unquestionable criteria which give miracles credibility.

An objective examination of the post-Apostolic wonders will show that they cannot measure up to these criteria, he insisted, and the admission that they do is a dangerous mistake.

The argument that the testimony of the Fathers must be unassailable in order to give validity to the Christian doctrines did not hold with him. The principles of evaluating the doctrines are Scriptural and Apostolic: "If they are not derived from Christ or his Apostles, nor founded in the Holy Scriptures, it is wholly indifferent to us Protestants, from what age they drew their birth."[3] He begged Protestants to be done with their reliance on Primitive authority, and to follow the example of William Chillingworth:

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1. Ibid., I, lxxxi. 2. Ibid., cf. lxxxi. 3. Ibid., p. lvii.

> By discarding those fallacious records and fictitious miracles which had seduced him, and committing himself to the sole guidance and infallible authority of the holy Scriptures . . . [he] has built the most solid and rational defense of the protestant cause which has ever been offered to the public since the reformation.[1]

Because a concern for the purity of doctrine and a cry for Biblical theology are never undue, Middleton's desire to expose the falseness in Roman Catholic doctrine, and to rebuke certain Protestants in the process, is not only beyond reproach, but commendable. His evangelical exhortations to return to the Reformers' principles are attenuated only by the contradictory statements he makes elsewhere on the importance of the Fathers and his later attacks on Scripture.

In addition to the reasons already given, another Middleton gives for undertaking the Free Inquiry originated in his recognition of the value and applicability of the historical method of criticism. He advocated the use of this method on the records of any institution or any period of history. He recognized as untenable the view that the distinction between sacred and secular history is supernatural intervention. He saw also that one must decide how long a unique intervention had lasted. Thus, he was attempting to remove the artificial boundary which theology had prescribed for sacred history; he argued that it is a part of the total record of history and can be examined in the same way as any other. Miracles being facts, or alleged facts, of history, the proper way to determine their credibility is by empirical, historical criticism, rather than by rationalism or dogmatism. In this he was saying in the eighteenth century what John Knox, in his Criticism and Faith, has said in the twentieth: "Until the boundaries

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1. Ibid., p. xcv.

of history itself are reached, we simply cannot say to the historian, 'Thus far only can you go!' 'Sacred history' is as certainly subject to the historian's examination as any other kind of history."[1]

Because Middleton thought the same way, he set out to vindicate the scientific method of criticizing history, and to demonstrate its value in refining fact from fiction, truth from legend.

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1. John Knox, Criticism and Faith(London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1952), p. 22.

CHAPTER III

EVIDENCE AND OPINION

1. The Arguments from Scripture for Continuing Miracles
2. The Rational Arguments
3. The Empirical Approach

Not only did Middleton question the traditional opinion as to how long miracles had continued, but he also questioned the way by which it had been arrived at. His dissatisfaction with the traditional approach to the evidence urged him to search for a better one.

He was preoccupied early in, and throughout, the Free Inquiry with an adequate method of evaluating the evidence. Although he allowed that a lack of need for miracles carries some weight, he insisted, nevertheless, that the conclusions based on a proper evaluation of the testimony, rather than the opinions based on conjecture, were all important. If the testimony is inadequate to vouch for continuing miracles, then rational arguments cannot be proofs. This approach cannot lead to satisfactory conclusions because it is unscientific. An empirical evaluation of the evidence yields the truth.

One point on which he and his critics agreed is that an examination of the Scriptures is a preliminary consideration. They disagreed, however, on the use to be made of the results. To Middleton, the Scriptures are not so much evidence on how long the miraculous powers were to continue, as the standard to use in evaluating the later testimony.

1. The Argument from Scripture for Continuing Miracles

Middleton asserted that it is of no use to look at the testimony on continuing miracles until the Scriptures have been considered:

> For till we have learnt [sic] from those sacred records, what they [the miraculous powers] really were, for what purposes granted, and in what manner exerted by the Apostles and first possessors of them, we cannot form a proper judgment on those evidences, which are brought either to confirm or confute their continuance in the Church, and must dispute consequently at random, as chance or prejudice may prompt us, about things unknown to us.[1]

To the traditional theologians of the eighteenth century, and to Middleton as well, the Gospel Record seemed to offer evidence in support of the miracles after the days of the Apostles. The seventeenth and eighteenth verses of chapter sixteen of Mark promise the Church continuing powers. The words as recorded in the King James Version of the Bible are:

> And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;
> They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Further, Paul speaks of miraculous powers in the Corinthian Church[2] and of his desire to impart them to the Romans.[3]

To Middleton the passage from Mark offers nothing conclusive on how long miracles continued: "In the original promise of these miraculous gifts, there is no intimation of any particular period, to which their continuance is limited."[4]

For a different reason from what he suggested, the text from

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, xi.
2. I Corinthians 12:1; 4-11; 28-31; 14:1. 3. Romans 1:11;12:6 ff.
4. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, xiv.

Mark has proved to be of no value in deciding the question at hand. Middleton, along with other eighteenth-century English Churchmen, accepted the text uncritically, but recent scholarship pronounces otherwise on it. In his commentary, Vincent Taylor says that, because of unanimous agreement among other scholars,

> . . . it is unnecessary to examine in detail the almost universal conclusion that xvi. 9-20 is not an original part of Mark. Both the external and internal evidence are decisive. The passage is omitted by B k sy^s, and important MSS. of the Gregorian, Armenian, and Aethiopic versions, and Eusebius and Jerome attest that it was wanting in almost all Gk. MSS. known to them. It is also significantly combined with the 'Shorter Ending' in L and ℵ and in Sahidic, Syrian, and Aethiopic MSS. . . . With this evidence, the internal evidence, based on the vocabulary, style and subject matter of the section, is in complete agreement. . . The RSV is fully justified in placing the passage in the margin instead of, as in the RV, in the text after a wide space.[1]

One of the more unusual approaches to the argument from Scripture was William Parker's. In a sermon preached at Oxford entitled, "The Expediency of some Divine Interposition During the First Ages of the Christian Church Considered," he deals with the promise in Mark. Making his case out of a pronoun, he alleges that if the miraculous powers had been confined to the Apostles, then the correct word to designate those to whom the powers would be given should have been you instead of them. The words of the text are "to them that believe."

Turning then to the second chapter of Acts, he observes that the power of the Holy Spirit was communicated to all the Apostles at once, while they were assembled at one place. Sensory evidence accompanied the communication, and it was permanent:

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1. Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1st ed., 1952, Reprinted 1955), p. 610.

> Else if it were not a permanent endowment, why was it bestowed in this formal way, on all at once: assembled in one place: and not rather given to each individual, at distinct times, and in distinct places, as particular exigencies should demand.[1]

He easily assumes that what was permanent with the Apostles passed on to their successors and lasted as long as needed. His argument is inadequate. Neither he nor Middleton could prove anything about the permanency or impermanency of a miraculous power.

Further, Middleton makes a good counterattack on the argument that miracles continued because they were needed: they are still needed.

The orthodox theologians had yet another partly Scriptural argument. It rests on what the Scripture writers and the Fathers had meant when they had used the word charisma, or the plural charismata, for "spiritual gifts."

Middleton insisted that according to Scriptural usage, the word is not confined to supernatural activity:

> For the word charisma, as well in it's [sic] native and proper sense, as in the use, which has ever been made of it, both by the sacred and the Primitive writers, signifies nothing more than a gift, whether it be natural or supernatural; ordinary or extraordinary.[2]

He argued that Paul had used the word sometimes to mean the gift of eternal life, sometimes a gift of God, and sometimes simply a gift of worldly riches, or an ability to minister to the necessities of the poor. The Church Fathers used it in the same sense as the Apostles, and, therefore, its usage proves nothing in favor of continuing gifts of a supernatural nature, and decides nothing on when they ceased.

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1. William Parker, Discourses on Special Subjects (Oxford: J. Fletcher, et. al., 1790), I, 63 f.

2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 150.

Most theologians disagreed. The almost unquestioned position was that both the Apostles and the Church Fathers had used the word exclusively to mean supernatural gifts of an extraordinary nature. William Dodwell maintains:

> It was highly proper, to appropriate some Word to this fixed and determinate Meaning; and in Fact the inspired Writers have so appropriated it; their Successors understood it so; Some of them have noted it, and All have followed their example by using the Word. . . in the same Sense.[1]

He argues that the Fathers' use of the word otherwise would have led to confusion in interpreting Paul.

Perhaps the best argument against Dodwell's reasoning and in support of Middleton's is Paul's use in Romans 1:11 of the two words which he interchangeably employs for "spiritual gifts." He says in this passage: "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you." The Greek for "spiritual gift" is χάρισμα πνευματικόν. Sanday and Headlam comment on these words:

> St. Paul has in mind the kind of gifts--partly what we would call natural and partly transcending the ordinary workings of nature--described in I Cor. xii-xiv; Rom. xii.6 ff. Some, probably most, of these gifts he possessed in an eminent degree himself (I Cor. xiv. 18), and he was assured that when he came to Rome he would be able to give the Christians there the fullest benefit of them.[2]

Archbishop Wake, the historian, held that the possession of the charismata was a presumptive argument from Scripture for continuing miraculous powers. It distinguished a special ministry in the Early Church; it recommended a person for an inferior office. He based his argument on the third verse of the sixth chapter of Acts, where reference is made to deacons being chosen because of being full

1. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 89.

2. William Sanday, and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; The International Critical Commentary, 1896), p. 21.

of the Holy Spirit. This satisfied Wake that the deacons had exercised supernatural powers, and if possession of the charismata recommended a person for this inferior office, it can be presumed, he says, that it recommended one for a superior order.

Recent scholars do not support this argument. They generally agree that in the Scriptures, extraordinary gifts, rather than recommending a person for an office in the Church, belong to the office. This view was advanced by B. B. Warfield:

> These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christians as such; nor for that matter of the Apostolic Church or the Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the Church.[1]

He insists that the New Testament teaching on the supernatural origin and nature of these gifts leads to this conclusion.

In support of Warfield, II Corinthians 12:12 may be cited: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works."

Middleton, then, has grounds for the statements he makes about the New Testament teaching on the nature of the charismata. His opponents, on the other hand, have no grounds for their dogmatic statements about the Fathers using the word exclusively to mean something extraordinary, because they understood that meaning to have been the exclusive one of Scripture. As Warfield points out when attempting to pronounce on how long the spiritual gifts continued, the function which they served is a more important consideration than their nature:

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1. Warfield, op. cit., p. 6.

> Their function [identification of the Apostles as the authorized founders of the Church] thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it. Of this we may make sure on the ground both of principle and of fact; that is to say, both under the guidance of the New Testament teaching as to their origin and nature, and on the credit of the testimony of later ages as to their cessation.[1]

Middleton was less concerned with textual and exegetical arguments than with what the testimony of Scripture offers in the way of help for evaluating the testimony of the Early Church. He insists that the miracles of the Bible suggest empirical principles that are important in this evaluation. He prefaces his examination of the wonder-working powers in the Scriptures with the philosophical statement that miracles are the most decisive proofs of the truth and divinity of any religion, if the circumstances which accompany them are "proper to persuade us of the reality of the facts said to be performed, and of the dignity of the end, for which they were performed."[2] He then insists that the Scriptural miracles are uniquely credible:

> Now of all the miracles of antiquity, there are none that can pretend to the character of originals, but those of the Old and New Testament; which though the oldest by far, of all others, of which any monuments now remain in the world, have yet maintained their credit to this day, through the perpetual opposition and scrutiny of ages.[3]

One fact which accredits them is the manner in which they were performed. The Apostles worked miracles sparingly and unostentatiously. They exercised their powers only when the occasion demanded it and a divine impulse directed them. They used the power solely to confirm their mission. Otherwise they were deprived of it. They were more modest than later wonder-workers: "We never find them calling out

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1. Ibid., p. 6. 2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, V, 60.
3. Ibid., p. 62.

upon the Magistrates and people to come and see the mighty wonders, which they were ready to exhibit before their eyes, on all occasions, at any warning, and in all places wherever they thought fit."[1]

The miracles of Scripture have other authentications. They were performed by Jesus and His Apostles. They were done openly and in such manner as could leave no doubt upon the senses of the eye-witnesses. Their purposes were reasonable and beneficial: testifying to a divine mission, giving decisive proofs of the truth and divinity of the Christian Religion, and contributing to an end "so great, so important, and so universally beneficial as to be highly worthy of the interposition of the Deity."[2]

In addition to the credit given them by the manner and purposes of their performance, the Scriptural miracles have the kind of testimony which corroborates their inherent credibility. The witnesses had reliable sensory experience by which to judge of the facts, and they were persons "whose honest characters exclude the suspicion of a fraud, and whose knowledge of the fact which they relate, scarce admits the probability of a mistake."[3]

Middleton and his opponents had no significant disagreement over the fact that experience and observation discover these principles from the miracles of Scripture. The disagreement arose over whether they apply also to the later miracles. With Middleton, the evidence from Scripture is so radically different from the evidence of the Early Church that it makes a case against miracles continuing. With his critics, the likenesses between the miracles of

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1. Ibid., I, 142. 2. Ibid., p. lxxxi. 3. Ibid., p. lxxxi.

Scripture and of the Post-Apostolic ages in their performance and purpose attest to the fact that the later ones are as authentic as the former.

The critics' position is less the case then the one upon which Middleton settles. The likenesses are remote, and, besides, other considerations--not applicable to the miracles of Scripture--weigh against the later testimony.

2. The Rational Arguments

Although the traditional eighteenth-century theologians considered the Scriptures a good foundation for their arguments on continuing miracles, this evidence was, in fact, a minor key in their argument. The major one was the several presumptions which they endorsed.

Most of their arguments, as mentioned in the first chapter, clustered around the position advanced by Archbishop Tillotson. The orthodox theologians pleaded the exigencies of the Early Church, and they argued for the propriety and expediency of divine interposition in meeting them.

Parker's sermon, referred to a few paragraphs back, urged expediency. Whereas Middleton had said that that argument is neither positive nor conclusive, but a hypothesis, Parker replies that he considers it as reliable as any argument that can be advanced. He goes on to contend for a rational inquiry into the matter which Middleton believes can only be decided empirically. He says:

> . . . such an enquiry is not hypothesis, nor is such inference founded on mere supposition. The principle will, in great measure at least, justify the conclusion: and that in proportion as the end proposed appears more visibly to require the means. For in every question about the disputed

> act of any rational agent, the end proposed, or the "cui bono," as the Latins call it, is always enquired into.[1]

This argument, like most of the rational efforts to defend continuing miracles, is unsatisfactory. Most of Parker's points were no major issue with Middleton, and he ignores the method which the latter had insisted is the only adequate way of approaching the question.

Zechariah Brooke consistently retorted to Middleton with arguments on the propriety of divine interposition. He combined various observations and opinions on what God has done and may do. If one observes the changes which the Supreme Being makes in nature, he discovers, Brooke says, that they do not proceed violently or hastily, but gently and gradually. Therefore, the probability that miracles had ceased suddenly upon the deaths of the Apostles is slight. Let a man consider seriously and impartially and then judge, Brooke says,

> . . . whether it be not probable, that the same extraordinary providence which accompanied the Apostles and other Christians upon the first preaching of the Gospel, continued to exert itself in their favour, during the whole ministry of all the Apostles; and whether upon the death of them, it is likely that it should cease at once; and not rather that it visibly resided in the Christian church sometime afterwards; and was at last gradually withdrawn, as the real exigencies of the Church were constantly and by degrees lessening, and the continuance of it made by that means less and less necessary.[2]

Abraham LeMoine offered similar rebuttal. His position is that it is improbable that the miraculous powers ceased suddenly, since the Apostles died at different times and in different places. If Middleton's view of a sudden withdrawal be accepted, then certain areas of the Church would have had flourishing miracles, while others would have had none. This situation is not very likely. Therefore, "It is highly probable, if not absolutely certain, that these miraculous

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1. Parker, op. cit., p. 67. 2. Brooke, op. cit., p. 17.

Powers subsisted into the Church some considerable Time after the Days of the Apostles."[1]

Aside from the weakness which his suppositions contribute to his argument, LeMoine overlooks the fact that Middleton had considered the miraculous powers to be only temporary with the Apostles, and that he had been less concerned about the exact date of their withdrawal than about the point that the testimony cannot support the view that they were at work in the Church fater the times of the Apostles.

William Dodwell staked his affirmation of continuing miracles on rational arguments. He reasons that the situation in which the Church was planted necessitated them, and this condition lasted "till the time of the Civil Establishment: after which it seemed reasonable to be less in Expectation of Miracles, when Human Means grew more powerful and sufficient."[2] During the state of emergency, authentic miracles served the same purpose they had served during the days of Jesus and His Apostles. And the same all-sufficient power was behind them. Further, it is reasonable to expect that the wise Providence that had enabled Jesus and His first followers to work miracles "might enable their Converts to do the same, whilst the like Difficulties, or greater, obstructed their Progress."[3]

The foregoing paragraphs reveal why Middleton had reason to become impatient with the traditional apology for continuing miracles. He states his impatience in several pungent statements and commendable

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1. Abraham LeMoine, A Treatise on Miracles(London: 1747), p. 512.

2. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 47.

3. Ibid., p. lxiii.

arguments. An effective expression of his disapproval of the traditional approach appears in a discussion on the gift of tongues. He uses this gift to illustrate the inadequacy of the argument on expediency. The evidence shows, he observes, that no Father claimed the gift and many expressed a want of it. Possession of it would surely have been expedient. From its scarcity as well as from other facts one discovers,

> . . . how rash and presumptuous it is, to form arguments so peremptorily upon the supposed necessity or propriety of a divine interposition, in this or that particular case; and to decide upon the views and motives of the Deity, by the narrow conceptions of human reason.[1]

In another place he expresses his unhappiness with the contemporary method of evaluating the evidence. The inadequacy of the rational approach is one reason he insists on confining authentic miracles to the times of the Apostles. He reasons that the admission of authentic ones after their days necessitates discriminating between true and false miracles and reveals "how fallacious the judgment even of the wisest will ever be found, when deserting the path of nature and experience, and giving the reins to fancy and conjecture, they attempt to illustrate the secret counsel of Providence."[2]

A system such as Charles Leslie's Short and Easy Method of dealing with the deists is good enough as far as it goes; it does not go far enough, though. Middleton evaluates Leslie's rules thus:

> . . . no pretence of miracles can deserve any attention without them; yet it does not necessarily follow, that all miracles, in which they may be found, ought to be received as true; since as far as I have been able to observe, within the compass of my reading, several might be produced both from

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, xxi.

2. Ibid., pp. xviii. f.

Popery and Paganism which seem to possess them all, and are yet unquestionably false.[1]

The post-Apostolic miracles, Middleton insisted, are claims without reality, in spite of the arguments which seem to support them.

3. The Empirical Approach

Invalidating the rational arguments for determining how long miracles had continued, Middleton did not leave the theologians without an alternative for determining the matter; he offered a method instead of arguments. In place of drawing a priori conclusions from testimony which was presupposed to be reliable and concluding that what seemed reasonable was actually the case, he attempted on the basis of objective examination to distinguish between credible and incredible reports. Two key words in his approach are experience and observation.

The revered rationalists were willing to grant that there is some validity in empirical investigation, but neither Middleton's contemporaries nor his immediate successors were convinced that a thoroughly empirical investigation of the post-Apostolic miracles is possible or valid, and that the rational arguments for them are inadequate. No one was willing to go as far as Middleton when he said: "It is experience alone, and the observation of facts, which can illustrate the truth of principles."[2]

He did not resolve experience into a contradiction, as Hume had. At the close of his treatise on miracles, the latter had said that the only miracle possible is what a Christian experiences: "A continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the prin-

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1. Ibid., V, 62 f. 2. Ibid., II, 75.

ciples of his understanding, and gives him determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."[1] In this case, each individual's experience is the only reliable testimony on a miracle, and according to other principles in Hume's essay, this testimony does not amount to a probability, let alone a proof.

Middleton has something different in mind when he speaks of experience. His reference is to the human response to ordinary as well as extraordinary phenomena, and to a psychological stimulus such as suggestion, and to the recording of what has been experienced.

What partly occasioned his confidence in these tools of investigation, as well as his dissatisfaction with the traditional method of evaluating the testimony on continuing miracles, and his conviction that there is available a more accurate--because it is objective--method of evaluation, was a cosmic observation:

> . . . the whole which the wit of man can possibly discover either of the ways or will of the creator, must be acquired by a contrary method; not by imagining vainly within ourselves, what may be proper or improper for him to do; but by looking abroad, and contemplating what he has actually done; and attending seriously to that revelation which he made of himself from the beginning, and placed continually before our eyes, in the wonderful works, and beautiful fabric of this visible world.[2]

The principal object upon which he concentrated empirically was the Fathers' testimony. He was concerned with two facets of it, the credibility of the facts and the credibility of the witnesses. He argued that they must corroborate each other. If either be

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1. Hume, op. cit., p. 150.

2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, xxi.

infirm, the evidence falls to the ground. It is especially important that the facts be credible, for no kind or amount of testimony can give credibility to incredible claims.

It is not difficult to determine factual credibility. Observable cosmic phenomena provide the standard:

> The testimony therefore of facts, as it is offered to our senses, in this wonderful fabric and constitution of worldly things, may properly be called the testimony of God himself; as it carries with it the surest instruction in all cases, and to all nations, which in the ordinary course of his providence he has thought fit to appoint for the guidance of human life.[1]

In addition to what one discovers from cosmic observation, the principles derived from the miracles recorded in Scripture, which are agreeable to sense and the reason, are the criteria to use in ascertaining the credibility of the facts to which the Primitive testimony attests.

This empirical canon, Middleton inserts, is valid for measuring the extraordinary facts, and witnesses to them, in any period of history: "The reason of believing them in any one age, will be found to be of equal force in all, as far as it depends on the characters of the persons attesting, or the nature of the things attested."[2]

The witnesses are more difficult to evaluate than the facts. Whereas the latter are open to an objective examination, it is known from experience that witnesses have the common nature of all men, "out of crafty and selfish views to dissemble and deceive; or, out of weakness and credulity to embrace and defend with zeal, what the craft of others had imposed upon them."[3] Because human nature behaves in this manner, the credibility of human testimony cannot be ascertained

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1. Ibid., I, xi. 2. Ibid., p. xvi. 3. Ibid., p. x.

with certainty. Any conclusion with regard to it amounts to no more than a conjecture or a presumption.

Middleton will not accept any record on the presupposition of the credibility of a witness. A person's reputation is only one criterion for determining the value of his testimony. Not all witnesses are equally objective. Therefore, it is a mistake,

> . . . [to] think the credibility of a witness sufficient to evince the certainty of all facts indifferently, whether natural or supernatural, probable or improbable; and knowing no distinction between faith and credulity, take a facility of believing, to be the surest mark of a sound Christian.[1]

The Church Fathers especially are subject to criticism. Their testimony shows them to have been,

> . . . extremely credulous and superstitious; possessed with strong prejudices and an enthusiastic zeal in favour, not only of Christianity in general, but of every particular doctrine which a wild imagination could ingraft upon it; and scrupling no arts or means, by which they might propagate the same principles: In short, . . . they were of a character from which nothing could be expected that was candid and impartial; nothing but what a weak or crafty understanding could supply, towards confirming those prejudices, with which they happened to be possessed; especially where religion was the subject, which, above all other motives, strengthens every biass [sic], and inflames every passion of the human mind.[2]

Middleton claims for the testimony of Scripture immunity from his criticisms:

> For, as far as miracles can evince the divinity of a religion, the pretensions of Christianity are confirmed by the evidence of such as, of all others on record, are the least liable to exception, and carry the clearest marks of their sincerity; being wrought by Christ and his apostles, for an end so great, so important, and so universally beneficial, as to be highly worthy of the interposition of the Deity; and wrought by the ministry of mean and simple men, in the open view of the people, as the testimonial of that divine mission to which they pretended, and delivered to us

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1. Ibid., p. vii. 2. Ibid., pp. xxviii f.

> by eye-witnesses, whose honest characters exclude the suspicion of fraud, and whose knowledge of the facts which they relate, scarce admits the probability of a mistake.[1]

Middleton's critics were apprehensive of his empirical approach. They dwelt on the consequences of his conclusions. They felt that he did not sufficiently immunize the Scriptures against the dangers of his criticisms. They were especially hesitant to accept his position that the evidence which the senses interpret upon observing the natural world is the testimony of God. Dodwell questions the use of the word surest to describe the instruction which this evidence affords a person in search of signs of God's activity in the world. He says, "Many other infidel writers have used similar statements, and such a principle would support their Cause, and undermine the Belief in all miraculous Interpositions."[2]

In the Vindication of the Free Inquiry Middleton acknowledges Dodwell's objections and attempts to clarify what he means. He argues that the natural laws and the disclosure of personal attributes are God's general revelation, given to the heathen long before the Gospel. He insists that this revelation is the clearest testimony of God available to the greatest number of people. As such, it provides the basis for all empirical research. Therefore, he says he is not bothered by the deism which certain divines find in his statement on the testimony of God:

> Let them call it what they please, I shall ever avow and defend it, as the fundamental, essential and vital part of all true religion, and what the Gospel itself must adopt, as it's [sic] best foundation and support.[3]

More on this discussion will follow in a later chapter.

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1. Ibid., pp. lxxx f. 2. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 13.
3. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 143.

The discussion between Middleton and Dodwell points out one of the problems connected with many of the former's statements. His meaning is not always clear, and he frequently makes remarks which invoke the accusation of impropriety. The statement under consideration, on the surface at least, raises serious questions as to how uniquely he regarded God's revelation in Christ. If it be remembered that he is setting up empirical rules for measuring the quality of evidence, rather than criticizing the content or questioning the primacy of a unique revelation, his statement loses some of its overtones of the deism rampant earlier in the century.

The merit of Dodwell's rebuttal is the demand for the clarification of views that seem to undermine Christian doctrine. At the same time, the weakness of the traditional position, as well as a trace of its inconsistency, is evident in the inference that "right reason" ultimately decides the validity of a special revelation.

Convinced as he was of the sterility of the traditional method of determining whether miracles had continued, Middleton was not ready to disregard rational considerations completely. Certain as he was of the importance of experience and observation in deciding the matter, he was also in agreement with Dodwell to a certain extent, and with what C. S. Lewis says in his recent work on miracles: "The question whether miracles occur can never be answered simply by experience. . . .the ordinary rules of historical inquiry cannot be worked until we have decided whether miracles are possible, and if so, how probable they are."[1] What Middleton insisted upon was that, admitting that miracles have happened, their possibility and probability have nothing to do with determining

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1. Lewis, op. cit., p. 11.

how long they continued.

Middleton's empirical approach to the witnesses made no more impression on the orthodox theologians than it had when he had used it to examine the facts. They saw no reason to question the testimony because of the characters of the Fathers. The miracles of the Early Church, Dodwell says, "are attested by the unanimous Suffrage of Persons every way qualified to judge of them."[1] He remarks in another place:

> . . . the Testimony of those Apologists, who wrote before the Establishment of Christianity, deserves the first Degree of Credit; for They speak of Things of which Themselves were Eye-Witnesses. The Manner in which They propose the Subject of Miracles to the Enquiry of their Adversaries implies it; Their own Conversion by that Means demonstrates it; and other Declarations often clearly avow it.[2]

As succeeding chapters will show, the witnesses were not as faithful or unprejudiced in testifying to extraordinary events as their eighteenth-century admirers supposed them to have been.

To conclude, both Middleton and his critics could have benefitted from a bit of colorful advice by C. S. Lewis on the approach to the evidence for miracles. Adorning his suggestions with literary crispness, Lewis advises those who set out to evaluate the evidence thus:

> You must develop a nose like a bloodhound for those steps in the argument which depend not on historical and linguistic knowledge, but on the concealed assumption that miracles are impossible, improbable, or improper.[3]

The bloodhounds who set out on Middleton's trail were convinced that they had found some such concealed assumptions in his

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1. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. lvi. 2. Ibid., p. xxiii.

3. Lewis, op. cit., p. 198.

examination of the Fathers' testimony. The truth is, that their conviction was largely due to the fact that their critical, historical sense was not as keen as his. He followed the trail wherever it led, and it led away from subjectivism and from the pitfalls of fiction in what was purported to be reliable historical testimony on facts.

PART II THE EXAMINATION

CHAPTER IV

FACTS AND FICTIONS: PROLEGOMENA

1. General Observations
2. Observations Relating to the Testimony
   (1.) The Apostolic Fathers' Silence
   (2.) The Abundance of Testimony from the Apologists and Early-Church Fathers
3. Observations Relating to the Performance of the Miracles
   (1.) The Publicity
   (2.) The Performers
4. Observations Relating to the Witnesses
   (1.) What Determines a Witness's Credibility
   (2.) The Credibility of the Fathers

Throughout his discussion, Middleton intersperses several of the observations which had led him to conclude that the testimony on the miracles of the Early Church contains more fiction than fact. He records his observations as he deals with the case for continuing miracles in general, and as he discusses the testimony, the miracles themselves, and the witnesses in particular.

1. General Observations

Several considerations preclude Middleton's giving credit to the wonders of the Early Church. He was convinced that prejudice and credulity had affected the Fathers. Expediency prompted them to subscribe to claims which they were either too credulous to examine of which they knew to be false. They had seen the success of the Apostolic miracles, and they had noted the success which the heathen had had with their claims. Therefore, they seized upon a sure and

efficient way to promote Christianity. Further, the Fathers' character was such that they did not scruple to claim false and incredible happenings as miraculous events.

Another general observation which led Middleton to classify the post-Apostolic miracles as he did arises out of his position on the need of miraculous powers in the upbuilding of the Church. His questioning their continuing need has already been noticed. In his Free Inquiry he expresses the opinion that the original Apostles and first disciples were the primary instruments in spreading the Gospel, and as such, they had miraculous powers for these reasons: "to over-rule the inveterate prejudices both of the Jews and Gentiles, and to bear up against the discouraging shocks of popular rage and persecution, which they were taught to expect in this noviciate of their ministry."[1] As a foundation was laid, the Church was less in need of miracles, and they eventually ceased. The Gospel was then left to make its way by the ordinary graces, rather than by the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.

Middleton's view of the function of the Apostolic miraculous powers agreed with the traditional view, but his position on a continuing need for them did not.

In connection with the discussion on their need, it should be pointed out that he tended at times to object as much to the miracles of the Early Church because they were not needed, as because of what the examination of the testimony concludes against them. Nevertheless, his provocative suggestions on this matter, as well as on the Fathers' motives, are examples of the adventuresome realism which characterizes

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, xxvi.

his much-needed piece of historical inquiry.

2. Observations Relating to the Testimony

Middleton argued that the circumstances connected with the testimony on the post-Apostolic miracles make a strong case for their fictitiousness.

In his survey of the testimony in the first section of the Free Inquiry, he stresses two facts which he believes support his argument: first, the Apostolic Fathers--many of whom had been conversant with the Apostles, though their exact dates are quite uncertain--are silent on miraculous powers, indicating either that the gifts had ceased or that they were quickly dying out; second, the Apologists and later Church Fathers testify to all sorts of fabulous happenings, and on the surface, the testimony looks fictitious.

(1.) The Apostolic Fathers' Silence

The Apostolic Fathers examined are Barnabas, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Hermas. Middleton reasons that if any miraculous gifts had been residing in the Church, we should expect to find references to them in the writings of these men of eminent zeal and piety who walked freshly in the tracks of the Apostles. What one finds is this:

> . . . there is not the least claim or pretension, in all their several pieces, to any of those extraordinary gifts, which are the subject of this inquiry; nor to any standing power of working miracles, as residing still among them, for the conversion of the heathen world. The whole purpose of their writings is, to illustrate the excellence and purity of the Christian doctrine; and the whole power of their ministry seems to have lain, in the innocent and amiable character of their lives, and in the pious, charitable, and fervent strain of their pastoral exhortations.[1]

He admits that these Fathers speak of spiritual gifts, but he is convinced that they mean ordinary gifts and graces.

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1. Ibid., pp. 123 f.

He observes that the first Henry Dodwell in his Dissertations in Irenaeus concludes from Ignatius's letter to the Church at Smyrna that miracles were abundant in the immediate post-Apostolic years. The introduction to the letter reads:

> Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church of God, the most high Father, and His beloved Son Jesus Christ, which has through mercy obtained every kind of gift, which is filled with faith and love, and is deficient in no gift, most worthy of God, and adorned with holiness: . . . .[1]

Middleton is convinced that Ignatius is speaking of ordinary graces instead of extraordinary gifts.

He examines another argument which Dodwell had offered on the most Primitive testimony for continuing miracles. It, again, is based on Ignatius's writings. In the fore part of the second century, the Father, anticipating a visit to Rome, requested of the Roman Christians, "I beseech you not to show 'inopportune kindness' to me. Let me be given to the wild beasts, for by their means, I can attain to God."[2]

Dodwell interprets Ignatius's request as implying that the Primitive Christians believed that intercessory prayer could perform the miracle of stopping the mouths of the beasts. Middleton insists that the passage implies nothing more than that Ignatius is requesting that the Roman Christians make no intercession for him with the civil authorities.

William Dodwell attempted to defend his father's argument, reasoning that it is valid because the Christians in Rome were not

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1. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson(eds.), Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325(Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), I, 239.

2. Henry Bettenson, The Early Christian Fathers(London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 62.

influential enough to intercede with the civil authorities. They had no means of swaying a decision of the Emperor, and they lacked other ordinary means of helping Ignatius. Therefore, the Father was recognizing the existence in the Church of extraordinary miraculous powers which intercessory prayer could call into action.

Middleton returns to the argument in his Vindication of the Free Inquiry. He refutes Dodwell's position, arguing that the Christians in Rome were of sufficient number and influence to have interceded with the Government. He dismisses Dodwell's arguments with a colorful remark that is not only awkward grammatically, but does his method of approach little credit:

> I shall now leave our Doctor to the quiet possession of his Father's proofs, as he calls them, which he may hang up in his parloir [sic] with the escutcheons of his arms, a record of perpetual honor to his family, by inabling [sic] them to boast of an ancestry, who, by his singular skill and sagacity, had recorded to the Christian Church, after a succession of several centuries, an illustrious miracle, wholly unknown and unobserved by all the primitive Fathers.[1]

Satisfactory evidence cannot be found to confirm Middleton's point on the political influence of the first Christians. In fact, the evidence seems to be against him. Speaking about the general attitude toward believers in the first two centuries, Latourette says that they were "chronically regarded with suspicion by large elements in the populace and among the respectable citizens."[2] He makes this comment on the attitude of the Government:

> The Christian churches were associations which were not legally authorized, and the Roman authorities, always

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 158.

2. Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 86.

> suspicious of organizations which might prove seditious, regarded them with jaundiced eye. Christians were haled before the courts as transgressors of the laws against treason, sacrilege, membership in a foreign cult, and the practice of magic. Since they would not share in the religious rites associated with the imperial cult, they were viewed as hostile to the state.[1]

Leaving this point, which determines little for or against standing miraculous powers, Middleton cites three other possible references to them in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. He refers to Clement, to Ignatius again, and to Polycarp. He points out that, rather than boasting, they tend to deny that they had had such powers.

One exception is Ignatius's comment in his Letter to the Philadelphians, to the effect that the news of divisions in the Church there had been given him by the Spirit. Although certain church historians build a theory of continuing miracles on the basis of this statement, Middleton can find no reason to consider Ignatius's words as evidence.

Finally, the report of Polycarp's martyrdom makes references to extraordinary happenings. At this point in the Free Inquiry Middleton is concerned only with Polycarp's prophesying that he would be burned alive. Whereas certain commentators have suggested that the Father must have been extraordinarily gifted in order to have made the prophecy, Middleton interprets the foreknowledge more simply. It is a historical fact that Polycarp lived at a time of cruel persecution, and he was opposed by the enemies of Christianity. Thus, his so-called prophecy can be explained, "as the effect of common prudence, without recurring to anything miraculous."[2] (As will be noted later, Middleton has a

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1. Ibid., p. 84. Cf. also Bettenson, op. cit., n. 1, p. 228.
2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 130.

natural and reasonable explanation for all the apparently extraordinary happenings connected with Polycarp's martyrdom.)

The examination of the Apostolic Fathers' testimony suggests to Middleton that in the earliest and purest ages of the Church, after the time of Jesus and His Apostles, there is "not the least reference to a standing power of working miracles, as exerted openly in the church, for the conviction of unbelievers."[1]

From this statement one may infer that Middleton allows that miracles might have continued for purposes other than for the conviction of unbelievers. He does not disallow the possibility; what he denies is that the Church had any standing miraculous powers. He admits that the Fathers might have experienced such gifts as extraordinary illuminations, visions, or divine impressions, but these were merely personal, "granted for their particular comfort, and reaching no farther than to themselves; and do not therefore in any manner affect or relate to the question now before us."[2]

His examination of the writings of the immediate successors of the Apostles closes with the statement, "The silence of all the apostolic writers, on the subjects of these gifts, must dispose us to conclude, that in those days they were all withdrawn."[3] This means, he interjects, that there is an interval of forty or fifty years when no miraculous powers were claimed.

As expected, these conclusions were strongly protested. Brooke calls Middleton's position a "mere Phantom of the Brain."[4] His method of reasoning is wrong, Brooke says. Deducing facts and opinions upon the basis of the silence of writers, "will ever be esteemed, by

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1. Ibid., p. 130. 2. Ibid., p. 131. 3. Ibid., p. 140.
4. Brooke, op. cit., p. 108.

the fair Inquirer after Truth, a very precarious and inconclusive way of arguing."[1]

The existence or non-existence of testimony seems to make little difference to Brooke. He says:

> . . . if we consider the Dignity of their [the Fathers'] Characters, the Eminence of their Stations, and the Circumstances of the Times in which they lived; These Things must rather dispose us to conclude that the standing Power of working Miracles did then actually reside in the Church; even tho' it should appear that they made no express mention of it.[2]

Other critics agreed. And if one persists in the argument from silence, William Dodwell has an explanation. The Apostolic Fathers did not need to mention miracles because they were concerned with writing to believers, who needed instruction in the Christian Faith, rather than accounts of extraordinary events. Furthermore, their silence presumes more in favor of, than against, miracles continuing: "Otherwise their Silence on so important an Alteration in their Circumstances as the withdrawing of those Gifts would occasion, was not to be accounted for."[3]

Neither the presumptions of the critics nor the testimonies which they consider reliable discredit Middleton's point. There is an absence of references to miraculous works in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. There is no justification for arguing that the silence is due to the commonness and frequency of miracles. Nor is there justification for rationalizing the vague references. The case must have been as Middleton suggested: in the first few years after the deaths of the Apostles, miraculous powers were wanting.

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1. Ibid., p. 72. 2. Ibid., p. 73.
3. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 132.

(2.) The Abundance of Testimony from the Apologists and Early-Church Fathers

Middleton makes a significant issue out of the contrast between the references to miracles by the earlier and later Fathers of the Church. Whereas silence characterizes the first group, loudness describes the latter. The Fathers of the second and third centuries explicitly and repeatedly declare that extraordinary gifts and miraculous powers were constantly and publicly being exerted by and among them.

Except for his emphasis on the amount and clarity of the testimony, he presents his argument effectively. He collects testimony--most of it on exorcising and prophesying-- from the Fathers of the second and third centuries, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Theophilus, Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Origen, Cyprian, and others.

Justin Martyr(d. 163) says in his Dialogue that prophetic gifts were bestowed in his days. In his second Apology he testifies to the exorcising and healing power of the Christians:

> For numberless demoniacs throughout the whole world, and in your city, many of our Christian men exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out of the men, though they could not be cured by all other exorcists, and those who used incantations and drugs.[1]

Irenaeus(d. 202) testifies in his treatises against heresies that the powers of healing the sick and casting out devils were possessed by members of the Early Church. He declares that frequently, after fasting and intercessory prayer on the part of a particular Church, dead people were raised. He also relates accounts of prophetic gifts, speaking with tongues, and expounding divine mysteries. Specific accounts

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1. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., II, 76 f.

from his writings will be introduced later.

Theophilus, the Bishop of Antoich, who was a contemporary of Irenaeus and flourished in the second half of the second century, replying to a taunt to disclose the Christian God, makes a reference to exorcism. He says that the heathen poets and philosophers were betraying a confusion and ignorance about God because they were puffed up with demons, and that the power of genuine exorcism was still around:

> And this is obvious from the fact, that sometimes, even till these days, the possessed are exorcised in the name of the true God, and these false spirits themselves confess that they are demons, who formerly possessed the poets.[1]

Tertullian(160-220) deals in his Apology with demon-possession. In order to prove that the pretenders to divinity in his day were only pretenders and inspired by demons, he challenges the rulers of the Roman Empire to make good their pretensions:

> Let a person be brought before your tribunals, who is plainly under demoniacal possession. The wicked spirit, bidden speak by a follower of Christ, will as readily make the truthful confession that he is a demon, as elsewhere he has falsely asserted that he is a god.[2]

Later in the same account he interprets what the restoration to normalcy of the demoniac would imply: "Your divinity is put in subjection to Christians; and you surely can never ascribe deity to that which is under authority of man."[3]

Arguing for the corporeity of the soul, he says in De Anima that a certain woman in his church had had miraculous powers, for in a prophetic vision she had received the truth of this doctrine of

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1. W. B. Flower, The Three Books of Theophilus to Autolycus on the Christian Religion (London: Joseph Masters and Co.,1860), p. 30.

2. Roberts and Donaldson, op.cit., XI, 99. 3. Ibid., p. 190.

the soul:

> For, seeing that we acknowledge spiritual charismata, or gifts, we too have merited the attainment of the prophetic gift, although coming after John. We have now amongst us a sister whose lot it has been to be favoured with sundry gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's day in the church.[1]

This woman's communications were examined with scrupulous care in order to probe their truth. Her witness was God. Further, Tertullian argues, "The apostle most assuredly foretold that there were to be 'spiritual gifts' in the Church."[2]

Looking into the writings of Minucius Felix, a contemporary of the men whose writings are being examined, and Origen(185-254), Middleton finds a lot more testimony on miracles in the third century. The first Apologist speaks of exorcising. The second urges the critic, Celsus, to consider the miracles, not only of Jesus and His Apostles, but the extant miracles which were in the third century persuading hearers to accept the Christian doctrines and teachings:

> And there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. They expel evil spirits, and perform many cures, and foresee certain events, according to the will of the Logos. And although Celsus, or the Jew whom he has introduced, may treat with mockery what I am going to say, I shall say it nevertheless, --that many have been converted to Christianity as if against their will, some sort of spirit having suddenly transformed their minds from a hatred of the doctrine to a readiness to die in its defence, and having appeared to them either in a waking vision or a dream of the night. Many such instances we have known, which, if we were to commit to writing, although they were seen and witnessed by ourselves, we should afford great occasion for ridicule to unbelievers,

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1. Ibid., XV, 427 f.

2. Ibid., p. 428.

> who would imagine that we, like those whom they suppose to have invented such things, had ourselves also done the same. But God is witness of our conscientious desire, not by false statements, but by testimonies of different kinds, to establish the divinity of the doctrine of Jesus.[1]

He goes on to relate other extraordinary happenings, most of them being the exorcising of demons.

Cyprian(d. 259) represents the mid third century. His epistles relate the visions which boys claimed to have had in the night, and by which the Holy Spirit supposedly conveyed instruction to the leaders of the Church. His "On the Vanity of Idols" argues that demons had inspired the illusions which resulted in pagan temples being built, and idolatrous worship being instituted. Poets and philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Trismegistus, and Hostanes admit the demonic work. The followers of the true God alone have the power to put an end to this mischief, Cyprian insists:

> These [demons] however, when adjured by us through the true God, at once yield and confess, and are constrained to go out from the bodies possessed. You may see them at our voice, and by the operation of the hidden majesty, smitten with stripes, burnt with fire, stretched out with the increase of a growing punishment, howling, groaning, entreating, confessing whence they came and when they depart, even in the hearing of those very persons who worship them, and either spring forth at once or vanish gradually, even as the faith of the sufferer comes in aid, or the grace of the healer effects.[2]

Except for a few more references to exorcising, these are the principal testimonies Middleton examines. He supposes that the warmest admirers of the Fathers of the Early Church will accept these specimens as adequate for determining whether miracles were happening in the second and third centuries.

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1. Ibid., X, 446. 2. Ibid., VII, 447.

His concluding observations reflect on what the emergence of this testimony, after a silence of from forty to fifty years, suggests. Suspicion is aroused. No sufficient reason can be given for the revival of the miraculous powers. If the Church had lacked them during the years when it needed them most, why should they have reappeared "when the Church, without any such help, had been gathering more and more strength all that while, by its own natural force?"[1]

Middleton's critics concerned themselves with pointing out that his argument that miracles had ceased and then had started up again is based on a premise which he cannot prove, and that the argument is not true, or if only partly true, is irrelevant. Reliable witnesses had given reliable testimony to the fact that miracles had never ceased.

This position has inadequate support. The vagueness of the testimony examined--which is, as Middleton notes, the best available--and the absurdity of what is claimed, offer little reason for the eighteenth-century English theologians to have believed that the Apostolic miraculous powers were continuing into the second and third centuries.

3. Observations Relating to the Performance of the Miracles

While observing the deficiencies of the testimony, Middleton also notes certain peculiarities about the miracles themselves which subject them to suspicion. They have about them an apparent fictitiousness. When we go beyond the miracles of the Gospel, he contends, "We meet with nothing in the later histories, on which we can depend, or nothing, rather, but what is apparently fabulous."[2]

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 141.

2. Ibid., p. xxvii.

(1.) The Publicity

The manner in which the later pretenders to miracles publicized their powers disturbed Middleton. He contrasts the Apostolic modesty with the post-Apostolic ostentation. Criticizing the latter, he says:

> . . . this confident and ostentatious manner of proclaiming their extraordinary powers, carries with it an air of quackery and imposture, as it was practised by the primitive wonder-workers; who in the affair especially of casting out devils, challenge all the world to come and see with what a superiority of power, they could chastise and drive those evil spirits out of the bodies of men, when no Conjurers, Inchanters, or Exorcists, either among the Jews or the gentiles, had been able to eject them.[1]

Even John Chapman, whom Middleton considers most credulous with regard to the post-Apostolic miracles, had admitted that "sometimes the Persons endued with those Spiritual Gifts did not act so wisely and regularly, nor employ their gifts so usefully and properly, as they ought to have done."[2]

Middleton has more to say on the publicity in the last section of the Free Inquiry. Here, in his treatment of the several objections to his Introductory Discourse, the second objection he notices is:

> . . . that all suspicion of fraud in the case of the primitive miracles seems to be precluded, by that public appeal and challenge which the Christian Apologists make to their enemies the Heathens, to come and see with their own eyes the reality of the facts which they attest.[3]

His reply to the objection begins with the comment that anyone who is well enough acquainted with the difficulties which the Apologists

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1. Ibid., p. 142.

2. John Chapman, Eusebius(London: Printed for W. Innys, et. al., 1741), p. 311.

3. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 324.

had in getting their works recognized would discover that the objection has no real weight. Approaching the matter historically, he notes that the Gentile writers of the first three centuries held the Gospel in such contempt, "that they scarce ever thought it worth while to make any enquiry about it, or to examine the merit of its pretensions."[1] He quotes several authorities to point out that civil rulers and literate non-Christians paid little attention to the early apologies.

He adds to this argument the fact that the publication and distribution of books were difficult. The information on the early miracles, therefore, was not as accessible to examination as his critics imagine.

What to Middleton is an argument against the post-Apostolic miracles is to his critics a voucher for them. They argue that the invitations to see the performances left the civil rulers and discerning people without the possibility of evading the evidence of the truth of Christianity. Therefore, the testimony by Minucius, Origen, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian is free of all suspicion and dispute.

An objection is raised to Middleton's thesis that the number and influence of the Christians of the first three centuries were insignificant. Just the contrary is true, Brooke argues, and here he is anxious to support his conviction with what he considers a valuable piece of historical evidence, namely, the testimony from Tertullian[2] that the Proconsuls of Africa and Asia thought that rather than try to extirpate the Christians they ought to tolerate them. Brooke fails to note certain other explanations for the tolerance shown Christians,

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1. Ibid., p. 325.

2. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., XI, cf. Apology, sec. 38. For a comment on Tertullian's historical accuracy, cf. Bettenson, op. cit., n. 2, pp. 228-9.

such as their changing attitude toward the emperors, the lapsing of anti-Christian edicts, the changing position on how great a threat Christians were to the doctrine of the emperor's divinity, and the vacillating tolerance of the emperors.

The critics' arguments do not expunge the effectiveness of Middleton's historical analysis of the attitude toward the early Christians and the attention evoked for and given to their works and writings. It should be pointed out, however, that since the evidence is scanty, little can be drawn from the heathens' responses to the Christians' challenges.

The available evidence nevertheless tallies with Middleton's statement that the Christians were not popular. Latourette's observations have been noted earlier in the chapter. Harnack, using the same historical references Middleton had, also supports this view:

> . . . the Christian religion was described as a "superstitio nova et malefica"(Seut., Nero 16), as a "superstitio prava, immodica,"(Plin., Op. x., 96,7), as an "existabilis superstitio"(Tacit., Annal, xv. 44), and as a "vana et demens superstitio"(Min. Felix 9), while the Christians themselves were characterized as "per flagitia invis," and blamed for their "odium generis humani."[1]

He notes, however, that the Christians were not entirely without respect from their contemporary intellectuals:

> Lucian saw in Christians half crazy, credulous fanatics, yet he could not altogether refuse them his respect. Galen explained their course of life as philosophic, and spoke of them in terms of high esteem. Porphry also treated them, and especially their theologians, the gnostics and Origen, as respectable opponents. But the vast majority of authors persisted in treating them as an utter abomination.[2]

While the more recent commentators on Church History agree with Middleton's view of the unpopularity of the early Christians, they are

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1. Adolf Harnack, The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, trans. James Moffatt(London: Williams and Norgate,1904),I,338.

2. Ibid., p. 339.

more conservative in the conclusions they draw from the information on the publication, distribution, and influence of early Christian literature. Harnack emphasizes the vitality of the literary intercourse between the various churches and prominent teachers in those ages, but he says, "To what extent the literature of Christianity fell into the hands of its opponents, is a matter about which we know very little."[1]

Middleton makes more out of this particular objection than the evidence merits, but he is again indicating his unwillingness to accept the testimony of the Church Fathers without a critical examination, his refusal to suppose results when valid evidence as to causes or effects is lacking, and his fear lest the genuine miracles of Christianity be identified with the questionable ones. His support of his position by a historical method is more effective than the objections and replies to it. One must admit that, whatever motivated the publicity on the miracles, it hurts them more than it helps; it places them under a suspicion from which neither adequate testimony nor rational arguments clear them.

(2.) The Performers

Another of Middleton's objections to the post-Apostolic miracles relates to the persons supposedly possessing the power to perform them. He observes in the second section of the Free Inquiry:

> . . . that the celebrated gifts of those ages were generally engrossed and exercised by private Christians, chiefly of the laity, who used to travel about from city to city, to assist the ordinary pastors of the church, and preachers of the gospel, in conversion of the pagans, by the extraordinary gifts with which they were supposed to

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1. Ibid., p. 471.

> be endued by the spirit of God, and the miraculous works which they pretended to perform.[1]

Analyzing all the evidence he is able to find, he discovers that none of the pastors, bishops, or martyrs, nor none of the chief persons and champions of the Christian cause, claim to have been so gifted. The Early-Church historians are vague on the matter. However, Origen hints that the casting out of demons was done by laymen, or the common Christians.[2]

The testimonies of the adversaries of Christianity are important to Middleton on this point. He notes the comment of Lucian(b. 120), that if a juggler became a Christian, he was sure to become rich quick. Celsus, writing early in the third century; the Emperor, Julian(ruled 361-363); and Porphry(233-305), all charge the Christian wonder-workers with fraud and deceit, and Celsus is especially critical of miracle-workers preying on ignorant and simple people.

Middleton notes the contrast between the instruments of miracles in the New Testament and in the post-Apostolic days. In the former, the miraculous powers were confined to the Apostles and a few eminent disciples who had a commission from the Apostles. The later miraculous powers seemed no longer to have been possessed by those in charge of the government of the Church or commissioned directly by the Apostles. According to Chrysostom, Tertullian, the Apostolic Constitutions, Augustine, and others, miracles were performed by boys, women, and private,obscure laymen.

Middleton does not let this investigation close without noting that the Roman Church made amends to the saints who, during their days on earth,

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 145.

2. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., X, cf. 428.

were destitute of these powers. The posthumous wonders which surround the relics of the heroes of the Early Church expose a reason for suspecting the claims of the successors of the Apostles.

The defense by Middleton's critics of the persons who supposedly had performed the miracles is no better than their defense of the publicity on them. Supposition and probability play a big part in their apology. The theologians say that the earliest Church Fathers allude to their possessing miraculous powers. At least, Dodwell observes, they do not exclude themselves, but present their testimony in such a way that "there could be the least suspicion of Art; and the mighty power of God shone the most illustriously thro' [sic] the Meanness of the Instruments."[1]

One piece of evidence presented against Middleton's conclusion is a conversation between Ignatius and Trajan. The conversation, as it appears in the Ante-Nicene Christian Library volume (with marginal notes), follows:

Trajan: Who art thou, wicked wretch [Literally, 'evil daemon'] who settest [Literally, 'art zealous'] thyself to transgress our commands, and persuadest others to do the same, so that they should miserably perish?

Ignatius: No one ought to call Theophorus [Or, 'he who carries God'] wicked; for all evil spirits [Literally, 'the daemons'] have departed from the servants of God. But if, because I am an enemy to these spirits you call me wicked in respect to them, I quite agree with you; for inasmuch as I have Christ the king of heaven [within me], I destroy all the devices of these [evil spirits.]

Trajan: And who is Theophorus?

Ignatius: He who has Christ within his breast.

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1. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 161.

> Trajan: Do we not then seem to you to have the gods in our mind, whose assistance we enjoy in fighting against our enemies?
>
> Ignatius: Thou are in error when thou callest the daemons of the nations gods. For there is but one God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that are in them; and one Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, whose kingdom may I enjoy.[1]

Brooke believes it probable that Ignatius is alluding to the same power to cast out demons that Jesus gave to the Apostles.

This defense is assailable. In the first place, the account from which the dialogue is taken is of questionable genuineness. The introductory notice to it states, "The weightiest objection is found in the fact that no reference to this narrative is to be traced during the first six centuries of our era."[2] In the second place, the conversation does not certify that Ignatius is claiming a charismatic gift. In the third place, as Middleton might have pointed out, Ignatius could have been mistaken if he had. Finally, the conversation does not support the reality of the kind of claim in question. While asserting a certain control over demons, Ignatius does not suggest that he is able, without reservations, to drive them out of people or chase them off heathen thrones.

Brooke insists that the positive testimony of the Fathers is to the effect that they themselves possessed miraculous powers:

> All the Fathers of the succeeding Ages unanimously agree, in declaring, not only that supernatural gifts and miraculous powers did then subsist in the Church, but also

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1. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., I, 289 ff.

2. Ibid., p. 289.

> in affirming that they Themselves were possessed of them. They constantly, upon every occasion, make use of These or the Like expressions: We are enabled to perform such and such extraordinary operations; such and such wonderful works are still done by Us; such and such miracles, even to this day, are wrought by Christians. [1]

The fact which Brooke fails to note is that the first person singular pronoun is conspiculously lacking in the testimony.

Middleton is also criticized for both the sparsity of the testimony he introduces and the quality he chooses. But nothing better is produced. There is reason to believe that nothing better can be found.

It is objected that he misrepresents the case. The critics argue that the promise at the close of Mark's Gospel is of liberal powers, and these cannot be presumed to have been restricted to the pastors and bishops and martyrs, but according to a wise Providence, must have been commonly distributed.

He is questioned for coloring Origen's ἰδιῶτης, the word used for the persons who were most prominent in performing the miracles, and for misunderstanding Cyprian's puerorum innocens aetas. Whereas he had interpreted Origen to mean ignorant and abnormal people, Brooke insists that the Apologist had in mind humble, simple Christians. Nor is Brooke satisfied with "boys" as the interpretation of Cyprian's words; he believes that the Father had "young men" in mind. This translation, he reasons, is more in keeping with Joel's passage: [2]

> And it shall come to pass afterward,
> that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
> your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
> your old men shall dream dreams,
> and your young men shall see visions.

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 120.

2. Joel 2:28.

Brooke contends, however, that it makes little difference how one interprets Cyprian; he is referring to a type of prophecy which is not the fruit of an extraordinary gift.

Brooke piled coals on the dead ashes of his previous line of argument. It is inadequate to reply to Middleton that the common people whom the testimony alludes to as the performers of the post-Apostolic miracles were a fulfillment of a prophetic utterance or of Jesus's promise. The testimony is not specific enough to support this conclusion. Further, as already shown, the supposed fire in the promise in the closing verses of Mark-- that believers would indiscriminately receive miraculous powers--was never divinely lit.

In spite of the criticisms of his examination of the persons who had supposedly performed the post-Apostolic miracles, Middleton effectively exposed the fictitiousness in this element of the testimony.

4. Observations Relating to the Witnesses

One of the most provocative issues of the controversy which Middleton stirred up concerned the reliability of the witnesses of the miracles. The issue was not new, however. As has been pointed out, the deistic controversy had brought this matter to the surface. The deists had charged the witnesses of the Scriptural miracles with prejudice, incompetence, and forgery. Peter Annet and Henry Dodwell II had brought the Apostles and first disciples onto the witness stand, and the orthodox theologians had attempted to defend them.

Middleton, along with others, dismissed the Apostles. But he subpoenaed the Church Fathers. He accused them of being prejudiced and credulous, and of lacking veracity and judgment, and he judged them

unreliable as witnesses of extraordinary events.

His trial of the witnesses, and their defense by the orthodox divines, forms one of the most frank and interesting parts of the controversy.

(1.) What Determines a Witness's Credibility

Essential to the eighteenth-century discussions on miracles was the determination of the credibility of a witness. If his integrity can be defended, then, the orthodox theologians argued, his testimony cannot be doubted.

It will be recalled how central in Middleton's argument this matter is. The credibility of a witness must corroborate the credibility of the facts in order to determine whether miracles had continued. Because miracles are extraordinary facts, and because not all witnesses are sufficiently qualified to testify to all facts, witnesses of miracles should be screened extremely carefully. One important area where a careful distinction must be made is between faith and credulity. A facility of believing is not the "surest mark of a sound Christian."[1]

Because the principles which qualify a witness are subjective and often concealed, the determination of his credibility involves supposition, Middleton asserts. The matter cannot be decided with assurance. The decision amounts to little more than a presumption or a conjecture.

There are certain traits of human nature which are detrimental to truthful testimony. Matters like deception and the witness's interest in a cause must be considered. Prejudice can cause illusion. Credulity

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, vii.

promotes a belief and a zealous defense of opinions imposed by the craft of others. Witnesses to the truth of Christianity are as susceptible to these influences as witnesses to any other facts. In fact, Middleton insists that witnesses in religious matters are more inclined to be prejudiced than witnesses of non-religious facts.

He singles out two criteria which are important in evaluating witnesses, and he introduces them in the opening statements of the section of the Free Inquiry in which he deals with the character of the persons who testify to the post-Apostolic miracles: "The authority of a writer, who affirms any quaestionable [sic] fact, must depend on the character of his veracity and of his judgment."[1] If one can be assured of a witness's veracity and judgment, he can be certain that the witness does not willingly deceive, or was not himself deceived. If there is any reason to doubt either of these, there is reason also to doubt the truth to which he testifies. The want of judgment alone may impeach his veracity and invalidate his testimony.

The suspicion which a poor judgment casts on testimony applies especially to a witness who is testifying to miracles. In such extraordinary cases a man's judgment is most liable to imposition, especially if the case "happens to be joined to the greater piety and simplicity of manners."[2]

The witnesses of the Scriptural miracles are acquitted of these human weaknesses. They meet two qualifications which give authority to their testimony: they were honest and they had firsthand experience of the facts which they relate.

Most of Middleton's contemporaries agreed with these principles, but they were neither as consistent nor as frank as he in applying them.

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1. Ibid., p. 148. 2. Ibid., p. 148.

(2.) The Credibility of the Fathers

Middleton charges that the Church-Fathers' testimony suffers from one of the influences which Locke had insisted on taking into consideration when considering a witness of religious matters. The latter had emphasized that enthusiasm precludes a reasoned-out conclusion, and "substitutes in the room of it the ungrounded fancies of a man's own brain, and assumes them for a foundation both of opinion and conduct."[1] Enthusiasm is especially reckless in extraordinary events and affairs:

> . . . the love of something extraordinary, the ease and glory [that] it is to be inspired and be above the common and natural ways of knowledge, so flatters many men's laziness, ignorance, and vanity, that when once they are got into this way of immediate revelation, of illumination without research, and of certainty without proof and without examination, it is a hard matter to get them out of it. Reason is lost upon them.[2]

No better words could be found to summarize the main reason why Middleton disqualifies the Fathers as witnesses of miracles.

His historical approach to them in the Introductory Discourse has already been noticed. Using the fourth century as a pivot for his argument, he notes that the senior Henry Dodwell and he are in agreement, that the miracles to which the Fathers of this century testified were forged and fabulous. He disassociates himself from Dodwell when the latter admits certain miracles after the fourth century on the testimony of Chrysostom. Middleton argues that Chrysostom held no advantage over the other Fathers mentioned by Dodwell, either in his personal character or in the type of miracles he relates:

> . . . his peculiar talents were those of a declamatory Preacher, whose art lay in warming the passions, not in convincing the reason; and whose pompous style and rhetorical florishes [sic], instead of being adapted to a simple

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1. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, p. 590.

2. Ibid., p. 592.

narrative of plain facts, was apt rather to exaggerate plain facts into miracles.[1]

The witnesses of miracles in the fourth century were, in Middleton's estimation, the dupes of fraud and imposture, and the later witnesses were even more deceived and deceiving.

Looking at the witnesses previous to this century, he continues to find them unreliable. His argument is that forgeries did not spring up overnight; they had been cultivated by the habits of former years:

> If these [fourth-century Fathers] then be found, either to have forged miracles themselves; or to have propagated what they knew to be forged; or to have been deluded so far by other people's forgeries, as to take them for real miracles; (of the one or the other of which, they were all unquestionably guilty) it will naturally excite in us, the same suspicion of their predecessors; who, in the same cause, and with the same zeal, were less learned, and more credulous, and in greater need of such arts for their defence and security.[2]

A commentary on the third-century Christians is borrowed from Cyprian's On the Lapsed. It reveals something of the coarse behavior of those times which, Middleton notes, certain divines designate as pure and innocent:

> Each one was desirous of increasing his estate; and forgetful of what believers had either done before in the times of the apostles, or always ought to do, they, with the insatiable ardour of covetousness, devoted themselves to the increase of property. Among the priests there was no devotedness of religion; among the ministers there was no sound faith; in their works there was no mercy; in their manners there was no discipline. In men, their beards were defaced; in women, their complexion was dyed: the eyes were falsified from what God's hand had made them; their hair was stained with a falsehood. They united in the bond of marriage with unbelievers; they prostituted the members of Christ to the Gentiles. They would swear not only rashly, but even more, would swear falsely; would despise those set over them with haughty swelling, would speak evil of one another with obstinate hatred. Very many bishops who ought to furnish both exhortation and example

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, lxiii.

2. Ibid., lxxiv.

> to others, despising their divine charge, became agents in secular business, forsook their throne, deserted their people, wandered about over foreign provinces, hunted the markets for gainful merchandise, while brethren were starving in the church. They sought to possess money in hoards, they seized estates by crafty deceits, they increased their gains by multiplying usuries.[1]

Middleton insists that the character of the first members of the Church is marked by credulity. Many of the ablest Christians were censured by their enemies for it. Forgery was also an affliction of the age. The Fathers accepted many forged books as genuinely and divinely inspired. Their motive was "the high authority of the Apostolic writings, and the zeal, with which they were fought for by all Churches."[2] Not only were the Fathers credulous and zealous, but they took advantage of the credulity of the age and of the liberty which Constantine's edicts had provided. Further, they recognized the power of miracles "to dazzle the senses and possess the minds of the multitudes,"[3] and they fabricated this power to the full, either pretending to possess it themselves or exalting those who claimed to.

The Free Inquiry expands Middleton's attack. In the Preface he emphasizes the fact that the empirical, rather than the a priori, road is the proper approach to determining how credible the Fathers were. He insists that his objectors cannot expect to answer him satisfactorily if they plan to "bear down facts with systems; and from the supposed integrity and piety of the Fathers, to infer the certainty of which they attest."[4]

In the third section of the Free Inquiry, he applies to the

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1. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., X, 354 f.
2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, lxxix.
3. Ibid., p.lxxx. 4. Ibid., p. xxx.

testimony of the Fathers his theory that the authority of a witness depends on his veracity and judgment. At the close of the second section he had anticipated what the conclusions of the next one would be; in the former he refers to the Fathers as men who were extremely credulous, "whose strong prejudices and ardent zeal for the interest of Christianity, would dispose them to embrace without examination, whatever seemed to promote so good a cause."[1]

Looking for proofs of strict veracity and sound judgment in the Early Church, he examines first the Apostolic Fathers. He spends little time with them, since, as he has already pointed out, they offer no direct testimony on continuing miracles. Further, their works are translated into English, and everyone may judge of them himself. He remarks, "They appear to have been men of great piety, integrity, and simplicity; and that is all, I think, which we need to declare of them on this occasion."[2]

Turning to the other Church Fathers, he deals at length with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. To him these two represent the character of the earliest Church leadership.

Justin Martyr's claim to a gift of expounding the Scriptures is a subject of Middleton's scrutiny. He inquires into what use Justin made of it, and if the interpretations he offers justify his claim. He quotes from the Dialogue, in which the prefiguration of the Cross in man's body and in other phenomena of nature is discussed, and then he comments:

> It would be endless to run through all the interpretations of the same kind which are to be found in this father; since his works are but little else than a wretched collection

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1. Ibid., p. 147. 2. Ibid., p. 149.

> of them: the pure flights of an enthusiastic fancy and heated brain, which no man in his sober senses could mistake for divine revelations.[1]

He wonders what credit is due Justin's testimony that others possessed miraculous powers, when he was so grossly deceived himself, and was willing to deceive others.

Middleton hastily passes on from this remark to criticize certain doctrines and traditions which Justin sanctioned. He propagated the doctrine of the millenium. He sanctioned spurious books. He accepted the story of the seventy--some sources say seventy-two--scholars in the separate cells who produced the Septuagint.

Other examples of Justin's want of judgment can be cited. For one thing, he quoted the Scriptures falsely and negligently. Again, seeing an inscription on a statue in Rome, he charged the rulers of Rome with worshipping an impostor, Simon the Magician. In an effective historical argument--though it is questionable how relevant Justin's ignorance of a later discovery is to an evaluation of his judgment--Middleton points out that archeological findings have shown that the Simon in question was not Simon Magus, as the Father had thought, but an ancient Sabine deity with a similar name.

Justin also accused the Jews of prejudice because they had extracted certain passages from Scripture. Attempting to show how unfounded the accusations are, and arguing that the Father should have known about the Sabine deity, Middleton summarizes:

> . . . if he was deceived in such plain and obvious facts, where a common discernment and moderate knowledge of history would have enabled him to have discovered the truth, how much the more easily would he be caught by a confederacy of subtle and crafty impostors, employing all their arts to

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1. Ibid., pp. 151 f.

> amaze and dazzle the senses of the credulous, and to put off their surprising tricks, for the miraculous effects of divine power.[1]

Middleton next brings Irenaeus to the stand. He points out that, of all the Fathers, Irenaeus offers the best collection of Apostolic traditions. He should be well qualified to relate them, since he was acquainted with individuals who had conversed with the Apostles.

Middleton first attacks certain of Irenaeus's doctrines. One of the most ridiculous is his assertion that Jesus had lived to be at least fifty years old. Like Justin, he asserted the doctrine of the millenium, primarily because of the influence of such men as Papias, of whom, Middleton notes, Eusebius is highly critical.[2] He advocated that Enoch and Elijah had been translated into the paradise from which Adam had been expelled, and to which Paul had attained. Like Justin again, he subscribed to the miraculous production of the Septuagint. Another of his stories is that the Scriptures, after having been destroyed during the Babylonian Captivity, were restored by Esdras, whom God had especially inspired for the task.

Finally, Irenaeus is attacked because of his manner of expounding the Scriptures. Several illustrations are offered to show that he approached the Bible like Justin. Following no acceptable rules of criticism, and giving little attention to the proper meaning of words, he indulged in a wild and enthusiastic freedom, inventing "typical senses and forced allusions, utterly trifling

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 164.

2. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesares, The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine, translated by Hugh Jackson Lawlor and John Ernest Leonard Oulton(London: The Macmillan Co., 1927), cf. I, 100 f.

and contemptible."[1]

With this examination, Middleton believes he has sufficiently displayed the judgment of the Early-Church Fathers. In short:

> . . . if a gross absurdity of opinions, and the belief of things impossible be the proof of a weak mind; if expositions of the Scripture, void of reason and common sense, betray a great want of judgment, then we may justly charge those defects upon these ancient fathers.[2]

Turning from the judgment of the Fathers to consider their veracity, Middleton says at the outset that it may be thought harsh to suspect men of piety, but there are sometimes grounds for such suspicions. The two who have just been examined affirm doctrines which have no foundation in Scripture, and which are improbable. They refer to Apostolic traditions and testimony in order to confirm their own opinions, but the doctrines being false, the traditions cannot be true. If these Fathers are not the authors of the fantastic views they propagate, then their predecessors must have been. Whoever is guilty, the putting forth of such views "gives but a lamentable idea of those primitive ages, and primitive champions of the Christian cause."[3]

After a few remarks about the Fathers' responsibility for the corruptions which crept into the traditions of the Early Church and their zeal in recommending its authority, Middleton finally discredits them because they held the belief that the idolatry, witchcraft, and magic arts of the pagans were all the work of demons, attempting to delude and destroy mankind. He quotes from several

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 174 f.

2. Ibid., p. 180. 3. Ibid., p. 182.

Fathers who had held these beliefs, confirming that gross credulity had possessed the minds of the early Christians. Their belief in the wonder-working power of demons had naturally inculcated in them a belief in their own possession of extraordinary powers:

> And when pious Christians are arrived at this pitch of credulity, as to believe, that evil spirits or evil men can work real miracles, in defiance and opposition to the authority of the Gospel, their very piety will oblige them to admit as miraculous whatever is pretended to be wrought in the defense of it, and so make them, of course the implicit dupes of their own wonder-workers.[1]

These bold charges disturbed Middleton's critics as much as any part of his argument. They contended that his abusive attitude toward the revered writers of antiquity endangered Christianity and hurt the foundation of all historical testimony.

Abraham LeMoine, one of the first to criticize Middleton, in a postscript to his Treatise of Miracles, published in 1747, attacked the charges in the Introductory Discourse. He believes that Middleton is too severe in blaming the Fathers for forging miracles or recording ones that they knew were fraudulent. He says, "They might as well have believed them too credulously; and both Charitably, and what we know of their piety, obliges us to think so, rather than to tax them with Knavery."[2] They exaggerated facts and carried the respect due to the saints and martyrs to an excess, but still, "They have given sufficient Proofs of their Learning, and remarkable Zeal, though sometimes misguided,

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1. Ibid., p. 196.

2. LeMoine, op. cit., p. 488.

for the Glory of God, and the Advancement of true Religion among Mankind."[1] They were neither knaves nor fools, though.

Thomas Church and William Parker also defended the Fathers because of their piety. The latter, in a sermon preached before the University of Oxford, said:

> Christians at present believe, upon the credit of the most pious, and the best reputed writers of ecclesiastical antiquity, who are dignified with the name of Fathers of the Church, from their paternal care of it in its origin, that these [miraculous] powers were for good reasons continued through the first centuries.[2]

Middleton's reply to this type of argument has already been noted. He granted that the Fathers were for the most part of unquestionable piety, but their piety checked neither their credulity nor, at times, their intellectual dishonesty.

LeMoine offered what he considered the proper answer to the charge that the Fathers give testimony on spurious books. Nothing can be held against their testimony because they show an ignorance of the results of historical inquiries or because they are sometimes credulous. They indicate no dishonesty, and "It is their Dishonesty which must be fully made out, in order to support the Charge brought against them, they they either forged, or made use of forged Miracles, knowing them to be so."[3]

Middleton's reasoning is that if either the judgment or veracity of a writer is in question, his authority limps.

LeMoine believed that the Fathers' credulity can be accounted for in part, "If we consider that it was probably founded upon a Presumption, at least, that the Power of Miracles had continued in the

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1. Ibid., p. 488. 2. Parker, op. cit., p. 65.

3. LeMoine, op. cit., p. 506.

Church, down to their Time."[1]

He deserves the criticism which he himself made of Middleton: "If indeed mere Surmises, groundless Suspicions, and unjust Presumptions can ever serve instead of Proofs, the Doctor has made out his Point to a Demonstration."[2]

Among other things, LeMoine's defense displayed one of the consequences of the plan which Middleton had followed in getting his views before the public. In publishing his scanty and candid Introductory Discourse some months previous to the fuller and more scientific Free Inquiry, he invited premature criticism. His bold and pointed statements seemed too irreverent to be alligned with orthodoxy, and he did not support his remarks in the earlier work with the illustrations which form the bulk of the later one.

The critics of his later publication insisted, like LeMoine, that the weaknesses with which Middleton charges the Fathers are insufficient to defame them. As noted earlier[3], Dodwell points out that they were eyewitnesses of the things to which they testify, that they offered their claims to the public for inspection, and that they were converted by believing what they saw and testified to.

Brooke is satisfied that, though the Fathers err in matters of speculation, they are not incompetent as witnesses of matters-of-fact, and he is convinced that their testimony on miracles is not speculation:

> It is to no purpose in the present question to insist, as Dr. Middleton has done, upon the doctrines and opinions, the reasonings and mistakes of the primitive Fathers. Whatever doctrines and opinions they entertain, whatever specimens

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1. Ibid., p. 490. 2. Ibid., p. 508.

3. Cf. p. 67.

> they may have given of their reasonings; whatever mistakes they may have fallen into; these things do not at all affect their testimony in the Point now before us; unless it can be proved withal, that these doctrines and opinions, these reasonings and mistakes are of such a nature, as to render them incompetent witnesses of facts.[1]

Dealing with Middleton's censure of Justin, the critics tried to show that he had manufactured the Father's claim to an extraordinary gift. They argued that he makes no such claim, and, therefore, nothing can be drawn up against him.

This argument will be treated more fully in the next chapter, when the specific miraculous powers are examined. For the moment, it should be noticed that the critics unbalanced Middleton's charges. He was evaluating less the kind of gift claimed than the credit due Justin's judgment as a witness of miracles on the basis of the kind of Biblical exposition he offers.

Brooke insisted that Middleton's case against Justin's interpretation of the inscription on the Roman statue is more controvertible than he supposes. Several men who hold the same view as Justin can be named.

John Jortin, the respected Church Historian contemporary with Middleton, cannot be counted on Brooke's list. He argued, like Middleton, that Justin had probably misinterpreted the inscription. He does not elaborate on the evidence, but he offers this common-sense conclusion:

> I am inclined to think that he [Justin] was mistaken, and that the proud Romans would never have deified a Samaritan knave, and a strolling magician. It seems more probable that they would have sent him to the house of correction, or have bestowed transportation upon him . . . .[2]

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 198.

2. Jortin, op. cit., II, 73.

Middleton's critics were convinced that Irenaeus was also a credible witness of miracles. They found nothing impeachable in either his judgment or his veracity. His strange doctrines in no way affect his qualifications as a witness; his peculiar theories can be justified. The suggestion was made that Middleton had taken liberty with Irenaeus's words and had thereby misrepresented his meaning.

The last criticism is worthless, because no significant change is made in translating the Father.

Another defense of the witnesses that was considered unanswerable was put forth as an objection to the Introductory Discourse: no suspicion of craft or deception can be held against persons of such unquestioned piety as the Fathers, since they exposed themselves to martyrdom in behalf of the truth in which they believed, and which they taught.

Middleton's preliminary retort to the objection is that, "Nothing gives so invincible a prejudice, and so strong a bias to the mind of man, as religious zeal in favour of everything that is thought useful to the object which excites it."[1]

Martyrdom, he attempts to show, should not be assigned too much importance in assessing the character of the Early Churchmen. It adds no additional weight to their authority as witnesses of miracles. The motives to it were attractive. It was regarded as guaranteeing an assurance, "not onely [sic] of an immortality of glory, and happiness in another world, in common with all other pious Christians, but of extraordinary and distinguished rewards and a degree of happiness,

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 332.

proportionable to the degree of their sufferings."[1] Besides, the conviction that the souls of the martyred went immediately to paradise and that the world would come to an end soon encouraged martyrdom.

There was also the Early Christians' conviction that the martyrs were miraculously released from the pain and torture of the act, and felt nothing but joy and delight. Middleton cites the example of Theodorus. Julian had had him tortured. He had been left as dead, but he was providentially saved and restored to life, and was seen later by a friend, to whom he related that he had felt little pain during his ordeal; a youth had stood by him and had wiped away his sweat, and he had been filled with delight.

The last motive to martyrdom which Middleton considers is "the scandal of flying from persecution, and the infamy which attended the lapsed Christians."[2] Life would have been unbearable for those who, through fear of the rack or of a cruel death, had denied their faith or submitted to the idolatrous demands of their persecutors.

Middleton notes also that the ablest and most eloquent of the Early Christians played a significant part in exciting people to martyrdom. Cyprian is one from whom he quotes.

The criticism he has offered does not mean, Middleton stresses, that the Church has had no sincere martyrs. On the contrary, there have been those, "who, with an invisible constancy, sustained the cause of Christ, at the expense of their lives."[3] Though they are to be admired, they are not to be exempted from the weaknesses of the ages in which they lived. Above all, martyrdom does not qualify them in a special

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1. Ibid., p. 334. 2. Ibid., p. 340. 3. Ibid., pp. 345 f.

way as witnesses of continuing miracles:

> . . . the circumstances of their Martyrdom, while it gives the strongest proof of the sincerity of their faith and trust in the promises of the Gospel, adds nothing to the character of their knowledge or their sagacity; nor consequently, any weight to their testimony, in preference to that of any other just and devout Christian whatsoever.[1]

The remarks on martyrdom were considered by Middleton's critics as blasphemous of the Fathers as any he had offered. Brooke regarded martyrdom as one of the presumptive evidences for continuing miracles. The act itself illustrates supernatural assistance. Eusebius, for instance, who neither could be deceived nor would propagate a lie, tells of the visible interposition of the Deity in behalf of persecuted Christians. His account of Polycarp's martyrdom is an example.

Brooke was positive about Eusebius's forthrightness. Latourette allows more latitude, remarking, "Eusebius is usually discriminating in his evaluation of data."[2]

Brooke opposed Middleton's suggestion that the preachers of the day whipped up enthusiasm among the Early Churchmen for martyrdom. They might have moved believers to be willing to undergo it, but the manner in which the martyrs conducted themselves indicates no unreasonable motivation.

Both Middleton and his critics made more out of the case of martyrdom than is justified. The former let it carry too much weight against the Early Christians, and the latter allowed it to presume too much in favor of them. In the first three centuries it was not as passionately sought as they suggested. Latourette comments:

> Some Christians courted martyrdom. This was partly because it brought honour from their fellow-Christians and was supposed to erase any sins which had been committed. It

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1. Ibid., p. 346. 2. Latourette, op. cit., p. 92.

> was also partly because of the devotion of those who were ambitious to share the fate of their Lord. The majority opinion of the Christians, while reverencing true martyrs, was against needlessly seeking arrest. We even read that some churches paid money to officials to insure freedom from molestation. It may well have been, that, compared with the total number of Christians, the martyrs were very few.[1]

In spite of certain weaknesses in his analysis of martyrdom and the credibility of a witness, Middleton still triumphs over his critics as an objective investigator. He is realistic in recognizing that ulterior motives can prompt a person to invite suffering in behalf of his belief.

An over-all look at the examination of the witnesses makes it clear that Middleton's critics trifled with irrelevancies in replying to him, and they neglected to notice that there are weaknesses in his work. His premise on what makes a witness reliable is valid enough, but it is questionable how important his examination of a person's character is; it is questionable how adequately he determines the qualifications of the witnesses to testify to continuing miracles; and it is questionable how adequately he reaches his conclusions against the Fathers. He discredits judgment too quickly, evaluating both it and veracity by contemporary standards. His severe criticism of Justin Martyr, for instance, does not do justice to the fact that Justin, as Bettenson points out, "was an educated man of the second century, seeking to commend the faith to others of like interest and the same background of culture."[2] The same writer observes that Justin is no profound thinker and no stylist: "His works are rambling and diffuse; wooly as well in texture of

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1. Ibid., p. 86. 2. Bettenson, op. cit., p. 13.

language as of thought."[1] Justin's style provides Middleton with the material for a personal incrimination.

The criticism of Irenaeus also reveals a failure to appreciate fully the circumstances under which he wrote. He was concerned with establishing the tradition of the Apostles in the face of the Gnostic claims of an esoteric revelation. He did not expound his doctrines systematically. Nor did he carefully examine every tradition of which he was aware. He sanctioned and taught strange doctrines. Nevertheless, his testimony is helpful and his writings are valuable, as the editors of the Ante-Nicene Christian Library point out:

> He is, for example, quite peculiar in imagining that our Lord lived to be an old man, and that His public ministry embraced at least ten years. But though, on these and some other points, the judgment of Irenaeus is clearly at fault, his word contains a vast deal of sound and valuable exposition of Scripture, in opposition to the fanciful systems of interpretation which prevailed in his day.2

Middleton expected too developed a critical capacity in the Fathers, and when he did not find it, he charged them with unethical apologetics. Lack of judgment too often passed with him for lack of veracity. He did not always evaluate accurately the historical pressures which had affected the Fathers' testimony, and he tended to exaggerate the effects which their weaknesses had on the ages in which they lived.

For instance, he failed to note that a more adequate explanation of the distortions in the Apostolic traditions exists than the suggestion that the Fathers deliberately misrepresented the truth.

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1. Ibid., p. 13.

2. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., V, xviii.

The Church, as Bettenson points out, was "working out the implications of the Apostolic faith and devotion, and translating the faith into the language of Hellenistic thought."[1] In formulating its doctrines it had to struggle against misrepresentations from without and distortions from within. In this situation, it is not unreasonable that the Fathers, especially those who had been trained in the pagan philosophies, should express themselves in thought patterns which parted from Scriptural or Apostolic language.

In spite of these criticisms of Middleton, it is nevertheless accurate to say that his preliminary and general observations on the post-Apostolic miracles were constructive. His frank attack on the testimony, the facts, and the witnesses exposed the flaws in the supposedly flawless halo which had surrounded the earliest history of Christianity. He was realistic in pointing out that, despite the fact that the Church reveres the Fathers for their piety, their fidelity, and certain scholastic achievements, they had shortcomings. His examination of their writings, and his criticisms of their weaknesses, supported by what he terms "specimens," acutely challenged the traditional opinion that their testimony is unquestionable evidence on continuing miracles.

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1. Bettenson, op. cit., p. 1.

CHAPTER V

FACTS AND FICTIONS: PRE FOURTH-CENTURY MIRACLES

The Miraculous Powers Which Middleton Finds the Church Had Claimed Previous to the Fourth Century:

1. Raising the Dead
2. Healing the Sick and Curing All Sorts of Diseases
3. Casting Out Devils, or the Cure of Demoniacs
4. Prophetic Visions, Ecstatic Trances, and the Discovery of Men's Hearts
5. Expounding the Scripture or the Mysteries of God
6. Tongues

Most of the persons who disagreed with Middleton's thesis in the Free Inquiry nevertheless agreed that the fourth century had been a great divide in the post-Apostolic miracles. There was a difference of opinion, however, over what it had divided. The difference was over whether it had separated the incredible from the absurd, or the credible from the incredible. Middleton insisted that all the miracles of the fourth century had been fictions, and all the miracles before and after that date, except those of Scripture, must be considered ingenuine. Those who disagreed with him generally insisted that the testimony had not become fictitious until the fourth century.

He concentrates on his thesis in the fourth section of the Free Inquiry, where he presents a detailed study of the post-Apostolic miraculous powers. In the literature available from the Early Church he finds six gifts which the Fathers claimed to have possessed.

1. Raising the Dead

Middleton begins his examination with the miracle which, though not the most frequently claimed , is "the principal indeed of all miracles,"[1] the raising of the dead. Three pieces of testimony are important in the discussion: certain remarks by Irenaeus; a reference by Eusebius to an incident related by Papias; and a conversation between Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, and a discerning acquaintance, Autolycus.

The first piece of important testimony from Irenaeus is found in a discussion in which he is contrasting Jesus's disciples and the Gnostics. He says that, according to the gift of grace received, the true disciples of Jesus(in the latter part of the second century) are those who perform miracles which promote the welfare of men. Miracles have happened, he remarks: "The dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years."[2]

He speaks of the gift of raising the dead again when he notes that those who follow the Gnostic heresy, in league with Simon or Carpocrates or others, claim to perform miracles. The Gnostics deceive with their magic. They cannot perform genuine wonders:

> And so far are they from being able to raise the dead, as the Lord raised them, and the apostles did by means of prayer, and as has been frequently done in the brotherhood on account of some necessity--the entire church in that particular locality entreating (the boon) with much fasting and prayer, the spirit of the dead man has returned, and he has been bestowed in answer to the prayers of the saints--that they do not even believe this can possibly be done, (and hold) that the resurrection from the dead is simply an acquaintance with that truth which they proclaim.[3]

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 196.

2. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., V, 246. 3. Ibid., p. 241.

Middleton considers Irenaeus's testimony feeble. It is the best evidence available on the gift of raising the dead, but it is too general and indefinite to argue that it continued.

Middleton's critics leap to Irenaeus's defense. Brooke is convinced that the circumstances under which he made his remarks free "the whole relation from all suspicion of falshood [sic]."[1] The Father is speaking to enemies and contrasting their tricks with true miracles. Can it be supposed, Brooke asks, that a man of common sense would relate untrue and unfounded facts?

As Middleton had argued earlier, Brooke's premise, Irenaeus's common sense, is a disputable matter.

Brooke adds to his criticism the charge that Middleton misrepresents Irenaeus's testimony. He accuses him of misinterpreting the literary construction which the Father uses to describe the place where a resurrection might have taken place. He understands Middleton to say that, according to Irenaeus, a resurrection could take place anywhere there is a Church. Whereas, Brooke says, what is actually meant is that anywhere a resurrection has occurred, the prayers of that particular Church were effective.

The criticism is weak and trivial. Middleton presents Irenaeus's meaning fairly enough. Furthermore, the point has little to do with whether the testimony can establish that Irenaeus was a witness of the raising of the dead.

The most serious weakness in Middleton's examination of this piece of testimony is his understanding the Father to mean that the gift was active and common in the second century. The words

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 225.

allow a different interpretation. It will be recalled that Irenaeus says that, "The dead even have been raised up and remained among us for many years." A commentator in the Ante-Nicene Christian Library makes this suggestion: "Possibly the venerable Father is speaking from his own personal recollection of some who had been raised from the dead, and had continued for a time living witnesses of the efficacy of Christian faith."[1] The other testimony quoted from Irenaeus also permits this interpretation.

This meaning is the one which J. S. McEwen, a lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, has more recently put forth. He discusses Irenaeus's words in an article, "The Ministry of Healing," printed in the Scottish Journal of Theology for June, 1954. Commenting on the Father's testimony that the dead have been raised up and "remained among us for many years," he reasons that the phrase implies that those who had been raised are no longer living.

"Between the miracles, and the date of Irenaeus's writing," McEwen says, "you have to find room for a fairly lengthy second span of life for these resurrected persons, and an unspecified period of decease after that."[2] Further, he contends that the passage does not make it clear that Irenaeus knew any of the resurrected persons: "We cannot legitimately deduce from his language that he was personally acquainted with them, nor even that they survived into his lifetime."[3] Why, he asks, does Irenaeus look way into the past for his evidence of miraculous gifts in the Church? He suggests:

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1. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., V, 246.

2. J. S. McEwen, "The Ministry of Healing," Scottish Journal of Theology, VII, 2 (1954), 138.

3. Ibid., p. 139.

> Can there be any reason save that the Church was not exercising these powers in a conspicuous degree when he wrote his book, about the year 180--and had not been doing so for a considerable time? No doubt he believed that the Church had freely exercised these powers in the past--but his belief is not evidence. . . .[1]

Although Middleton does not dismiss Irenaeus's testimony with equally scientific reasoning, he nevertheless can be credited with pointing out its internal weakness. Because of its general nature, it contributes nothing to give credence to the argument that Irenaeus was a witness to the gift of raising the dead.

Looking for other references in the Fathers on the continuation of this gift, Middleton finds one in Eusebius, who comments on an incident related by Papias:

> . . . it is right to add to the words of Papias which we have quoted other sayings, in which he relates some other miraculous events likewise, as having come down to him by tradition. It has been shown, indeed, by what has gone before, that Philip the apostle resided in Hierapolis with his daughters; but now it must be pointed out that Papias, their contemporary, mentions that he had a wonderful story from the daughters of Philip. For he relates that the resurrection of a dead body took place in his day; and, on the other hand, he tells of another miraculous happening, concerned with Justus who was surnamed Barsabbas: that he drank a deadly poison, and, by the grace of the Lord, suffered no unpleasant effects.[2]

Middleton observes that Eusebius seems to rank these wonders among the other "fabulous stories delivered by that weak man."[3]

Middleton's critics were more concerned with his analysis of Eusebius's evaluation of Papias than with the passage itself. Their concern can be partly justified, for though it is true that Eusebius speaks of Papias as a man of "exceedingly small intelligence,"[4] and

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1. Ibid., p. 139. 2. Eusebius, op. cit., p. 100.
3. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 197.
4. Eusebius, op. cit., p. 100.

notes that he misinterprets Apostolic accounts, he does not correlate these shortcomings with his testimony on miraculous events.

Both Middleton and his critics fail to observe that the resurrection mentioned by Papias can be admitted and the admission be consistent with the thesis of the Free Inquiry. Papias is relating, Eusebius says, a wonderful story which he had heard from the daughters of Philip. The next sentence is, "For he relates that the resurrection took place in his day." The question is: What is the antecedent of "his"? Although Middleton and his critics seem to consider it to be "Papias," the editor of the Ante-Nicene Christian Library points out a conclusion which is more plausible:

> "In his day" may mean "in the days of Papias," or "in the days of Philip." As the narrative came from the daughters of Philip, it is more likely that Philip's days are meant.[1]

If the antecedent of the pronoun is "Philip," then the resurrection could have taken place during the Apostolic Age.

Eusebius's record settles for William Dodwell the question of whether the power to raise the dead had continued. Even if it could be maintained that Eusebius had discredited Papias's testimony, it would not follow, he insists, that the former disbelieved in this gift continuing, "because he has Himself preserved to us the forementioned Testimony of Irenaeus, which he certainly would not have done, had he not given credit to it himself."[2] Apparently Dodwell believed that a historian has to consider as fact every testimony which he relates.

Middleton had reason to be impatient with the blindness to the

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1. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., I, 445.

2. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 200.

apparent weaknesses in the testimony on this gift.

He next turns to an incident which had occurred between Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, and an acquaintance, Autolycus. The latter, a man of reputation and learning, had harassed the former because he was a Christian. One of Autolycus's taunts was, "Show me even one raised from the dead, and alive, that seeing, I may believe."[1] Theophilus replies:

> But suppose I could show you one raised from the dead, and alive, you would disbelieve even this. God gives you many sure tokens why you should believe Him: for consider, I pray, the end of seasons, days and years; how they die and rise again. And is there not also a resurrection of seeds and fruits, and that too for the use of mankind?
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> Be not faithless, but believing; for I also did not once believe it possible. But now I believe, since I have weighed these proofs, and at the same time carefully considered the sacred writings of the holy prophets, who also foretold by the Spirit of God, things past as they really occurred, things present as they now are, and things future in the order in which they will be accomplished. Convinced then, by the things that have come to pass, and were foretold, I no longer doubt, but believe, obeying God.[2]

Before he offers his own evaluation, Middleton notes Henry Dodwell's handling of this incident. The latter's analysis is that Theophilus could not present a person who had died and had been brought back to life because of these reasons: the incident happened at a time--the latter part of the second century--when resurrections were no longer common; the gift had vanished; and those who had once been raised were dead for the second time.

Middleton agrees. Theophilus would not meet Autolycus's request because he could not; he himself did not possess the power to raise somebody from the dead, nor did any of his contemporaries,

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1. Flower, op. cit., p. 15. 2. Ibid., pp. 15-17.

nor had any of his immediate predecessors. This incident is evidence that the gift was non-existent after the times of the Apostles.

The principal objection to Middleton's treatment of the incident was that he misinterprets Autolycus's request. Brooke takes the suggested theory that the miraculous powers were only temporary with the Apostles, and asks if that might not have been the case with Theophilus. He next suggests three possible interpretations of Autolycus's demand: first, that an instance be cited of a man raised; second, that a person who had been raised be presented; and third, that a person be raised before Autolycus's eyes.

Whereas Middleton holds to the second interpretation, and William Dodwell to the third, Brooke thinks all three plausible, but he considers Middleton's use of the incident irrelevant. If Theophilus had understood Autolycus's request in the first sense, he would have been at no loss, Brooke holds, to have referred to several resurrections, both in the Bible and Early-Church History. If the Bishop had understood Autolycus in the second sense, he would have accomplished little in meeting the request: "In such a case it would be a very difficult matter to convince a Man of his turn of mind, that this Resurrection was not pretended but real."[1] If Autolycus's request had been understood in the third sense, there would still be little gained by performing a resurrection before his eyes.

Brooke summarizes:

> In the first place he [Theophilus] expressly tells him, which is indeed a strong confirmation of the truth of what I am contending for; that if he [Autolycus] was to see the thing done in his presence, there would be nothing meritorious in believing, that he could not believe, upon the information of

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 239.

> his senses. In the next place, he puts him in mind of the inconsistency of his own conduct, in demanding a stronger proof of the Resurrection from the Christians, than from his Pagan Brethren; for he admits the truth of it in his own religion, and yet disputes the reality of it in the Christian. And in the last place, he takes notice, that as to bringing any person into his presence, who had been raised from the Dead; this would not answer the purpose of his demand; it might not perhaps give the satisfaction, he expected; since in such a case there would be still room left for cavil and doubt.[1]

Brooke cannot see how the passage from Theophilus can be used to invalidate the express testimony of Irenaeus that resurrections were happening in the second century of Christianity. That the gift of raising the dead was inoperative in Irenaeus's time is, he summarizes, "more than what the consummate art and exquisite subtlety of the most hackneyed Controversialists will be able to support."[2]

Dodwell agrees. Whether Theophilus had raised somebody from the dead in front of Autolycus has nothing to do with the validity of Irenaeus's testimony that he knew of several persons who had been raised. He suggests, "Theophilus might possibly have this Gift, and yet not think this a proper Occasion to exert it, and the Reasonings, which He uses in his Answer, very much favour this Supposition."[3]

Another suggestion he makes as to why Theophilus did not comply with the request is the possibility that the Church at Antioch had not lost such an eminent person as was considered worthy to recall by so miraculous a work as a resurrection. Further, Jesus did not always meet the demand for evidences, and He urged His followers not to cast their pearls before swine. Therefore, no valid objection can be held against Theophilus for not satisfying Autolycus.

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1. Ibid., pp. 241 f. 2. Ibid., p. 243.

3. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 208.

And no objection arises, therefrom, Dodwell contends, against Irenaeus's testimony.

In the Vindication Middleton defends himself against Dodwell. His defense is a retreat from objective criticism, a weakness which appears frequently in his posthumous works. His reply is that his interpretation of Autolycus's demand is the same as Dodwell's father's, that is, that Autolycus wanted to see somebody who had been raised. The son, holding that Autolycus was demanding to see somebody being raised, contradicts the father. Middleton asks, "What shall we say to him now, when we find him rejecting his Father's sense, and declaring it to be wrong, though it be demonstrably right, and what he ought to have embraced, if it had come from an adversary?"[1]

Middleton becomes no more objective or convincing when he considers the impropriety of presenting a resurrected person to Autolycus, or of performing a resurrection before his eyes. Although he does not state his evidence, he insists that Autolycus, like himself, was a candid inquirer after truth, and that Theophilus's failure indicates that the Fathers could not make good their claims:

> . . . all their [the Fathers'] pretended instances of this great Miracle were of such a kind, that could not stand the test of a fair examination, nor give any satisfactory proof of their reality, to a candid and impartial inquirer.[2]

Both Middleton and his critics deal inadequately with this incident. The former deduces too much when he pleads that Theophilus answered Autolycus as he did because he did not penetrate the sincerity of Autolycus's request. His critics presume too much on why the request was not met. Their interpretations of the request are

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 205. 2. Ibid., p. 208.

not as true to the text as Middleton's. And they presume too much as to what Theophilus could or might have done and what might have been the results, had a resurrection occurred or had a resurrected person been presented.

Middleton closes his examination of this gift with four observations. First, it is incredible that a case as wonderful as a resurrection could have been so common, and yet no specific incident could be cited. Second, it is incredible that the gift could have been exerted any place where there was a group of Christians--as Middleton interprets Irenaeus to mean--yet those who were not of the Church were continuing to insist that a resurrection was impossible. Third, it is incredible that the gift could have been so common in the days of Irenaeus and be lost by the time of Theophilus; they lived at the same time. If resurrections were as frequent in the first three centuries as Irenaeus and the senior Henry Dodwell suggest, they must have made "great noise in the world, and been celebrated, not only by the primitive Fathers, but by all the Historians of those times."[1] The dearth of testimony argues otherwise.

Fourth, it is incredible that a power, "of all others the most affecting and reputable to the Church, should be withdrawn at a time, when it's [sic] adversaries were defying them to shew [sic] any effects of it, and putting the merits of the controversy upon that very issue."[2] The foregoing observations make Middleton suspicious of this prime miracle continuing in the Church.

Various arguments were offered in opposition to these observations. One reply to the point on the scarcity of testimony was that the

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1. Ibid., I, 197. 2. Ibid., p. 199.

miracle was so frequent, though limited to necessary occasions, that repeated mentioning of it was superfluous. All resurrections bore the same stamp of extraordinariness. Heathen historians would not have mentioned them, and Christian historians did not, Dodwell argues, because, "Such a Specification of Instances of the Person raised might have been attended with Inconveniences, which it was their Business to provide against."[1] He also has a rational reason for the general nature of the testimony; it shows Christian modesty. If, in obedience to Jesus, the early Christians "omitted to name the Persons raised, that They might not bring down Persecution and Vengeance on them, They shewed [sic] their Piety and Prudence in so Doing."[2]

Brooke has a different, but no better, answer for the scarcity of testimony. He refers to the testimony of Scripture. Surely Middleton does not disbelieve the resurrection of Lazarus on the testimony of John. Not a syllable about Lazarus appears in any other historical record.

"How comes it to pass then," he asks, " that what is thought to be no reasonable exception to the testimony of the Evangelist, should be looked upon, as an insuperable objection to our belief of what is recorded by Irenaeus?"[3]

In reply, John at least mentions the name of the person raised, and he gives other details of the resurrection. In addition, he relates who exercised the miraculous power, and collateral testimonies support the fact that Jesus could raise the dead.

Brooke is satisfied with what could not satisfy Middleton, that

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1. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 203. 2. Ibid., p. 204.
3. Brooke, op. cit., p. 227.

Irenaeus's testimony is adequate to assure that this gift continued:

> The authority of One Writer, who is a competent Witness, is sufficient to establish a Fact, to the satisfaction of every impartial inquirer after truth, if there lies no reasonable exception to the Fact from the nature of the thing. The concurrence of other Writers may properly be considered only, as a subsidiary proof; the want of which therefore cannot be thought to evacuate the force of the principal evidence.[1]

One question which could be raised is: Is there not a considerable and reasonable exception to the fact of a resurrection from the nature of the phenomenon?

In his Vindication Middleton makes other counterattacks on the arguments of Dodwell and Thomas Church, but much of his rebuttal succumbs to the kind of argumentation in which his critics delighted.

Dodwell has the last word, but his reply is more guesswork. In all probability, he says, the Church might have thought it significant to intercede for a resurrection immediately before the interment of a dead body, and if one had occurred, the knowledge of it would not have been widespread. Even if non-Christians had seen it, some would have evaded the evidence by denying that it had happened. His final word about the testimony which Middleton discredits is that, even if Irenaeus were disregarded, other reasonable circumstances argue that the gift of raising the dead continued. He is candid enough to admit that the argument is partly presumptive:

> The gift was promised and bestowed at first amongst Others; that Others continued we have the concurrent Testimony of all the Primitive Writers, and therefore it may be presumed that this did not entirely cease during the continuance of the rest, unless there be some positive Evidence to the contrary, or unless some Reason can be assigned from the Nature of the Thing, why this should be withdrawn sooner than the others.[2]

Though Middleton had died before this statement was published,

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1. Ibid., p. 232. 2. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 496.

he had already answered it when he had said of his critics in his Vindication:

> While they defend these Miracles to be true, their very defences prove them to be false; and while they assume to themselves the title of Free Answerers, their answers shew [sic] them to be slaves to systems, and listed for the perpetual defence of received and established opinions, whether true or false.[1]

Middleton's critics could not alter the fact which he had pointed out: the only statement which comes near to being a testimony that the gift of raising the dead had continued after the times of the Apostles is the remark of Irenaeus. No surmises or presumptions carry as much weight as this fact. Even if Middleton missed the mark in interpreting Autolycus's request and in applying the incident to his discussion of Irenaeus's testimony--which it is not necessary to concede--it stands that the testimony is scanty and unconvincing, and the suppositions of the believers in continuing miracles do not substitute for the lack of evidence.

Middleton's frank appraisal of the situation in which the Fathers lived, his objective analysis of their testimony, and his dissatisfaction with conclusions for which the evidence of testimony cannot vouch give him the advantage over his critics. It is safe to conclude with him, that the gift of raising the dead was not the privilege of those who lived after the days of the Apostles. Neither rational considerations nor the evidence of testimony makes any other conclusion plausible.

2. Healing the Sick and Curing All Sorts of Diseases

The next gift to which Middleton gives attention is the claim

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 218.

to heal the sick and cure all sorts of diseases. He is concerned here with all miraculous cures except demon-possession, which receives special treatment later.

He finds more testimony on healing than on raising the dead, and it is more specific. Samples are taken from Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, Jerome, and Athenagoras.

Irenaeus's remarks are found in the same paragraph from which a reference on raising the dead was taken. Speaking of those who are true disciples, and contrasting their powers with the spurious claims of the heretics, he says that, according to the gift of grace given, the genuine Christian disciples "heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole."[1]

Origen's testimony appears in his controversy with Celsus over a healing spirit, Aesculapius, to whom certain Greeks had attributed a power to heal, do good, and foretell the future. When Celsus says he can produce a number of Greeks and barbarians who have seen Aesculapius and can testify to his wonders, Origen replies:

> . . . we, if we deem this a matter of importance, can clearly show a countless multitude of Greeks and barbarians who acknowledge the existence of Jesus. And some give evidence of their having received through this faith a marvellous power by the cures which they perform, invoking no other name over those who need their help than that of the God of all things, and of Jesus, along with a mention of His history. For by these means we too have seen many persons freed from grievous calamities, and from distractions of mind, and madness, and countless other evils, which could be cured neither by men nor devils.[2]

Another selection from Origen is relevant to a later discussion, but it will be inserted now. In the chapter following the one from which the above comments are taken, he begins curiously to abate the importance of miraculous healing. Though one would admit that a

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1. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., V, 246. 2. Ibid., XXIII, 104.

healing spirit such as Aesculapius once lived, the fact would be of minor importance, Origen says:

> . . . since the cure of bodies is a thing indifferent, and a matter within the reach not merely of the good, but also of the bad; . . . . you must show that they who practise healing or foretell the future are in no respect wicked, but exhibit a perfect pattern of virtue, and are not far from being regarded as gods. But they will not be able to show that they are virtuous who practise the art of healing, or who are gifted with foreknowledge, seeing many who are not fit to live are related to have been healed; and these, too, persons whom, as leading improper lives, no wise physician would wish to heal.[1]

Tertullian relates incidents of miraculous healings. Writing to Scapula, he reminds him that many famous people, as well as common men, have benefited from the extraordinary powers of the Christians. Certain notable persons have been dispossessed of devils and healed of diseases. He comments on the incident in which the ruler, Severus (ruled 193-211) had been cured by a Christian:

> Even Severus himself, the father of Antonine, was graciously mindful of the Christians. For he sought out the Christian Proculus, surnamed Torpacion, the steward of Euhodias, and in gratitude for his having once cured him by anointing, he kept him in his palace till the day of his death. Antonine, too, brought up as he was on Christian milk, was intimately acquainted with this man. Both women and men of highest rank, whom Severus knew well to be Christians, were not merely permitted by him to remain uninjured; but he even bore distinguished testimony in their favour, and gave them publicly back to us from the hands of a raging populace.[2]

The testimony of Jerome(342-420) appears in his biography of Hilarion, where he relates several cures which the Monk had performed. He gives details of Hilarion's methods. In curing a daughter and son-in-law of a certain holy woman, Constantia, Hilarion anointed the sufferers with oil previous to performing the miracle.[3]

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1. Ibid., p. 105. 2. Ibid., XI, 50 f.

3. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff(eds.), A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church(Oxford: James Parker and Company, 1893), VI, cf. 314.

The foregoing testimonies provide Middleton with the material for his conclusions on faith-healing. The first observation he makes is that the Christian claims to the gift made little impression on the heathen, who through fraud and imposture also pretended to cure miraculously. References are found on heathen monuments and tablets. It is certain, he states, "that all those heathen miracles were pure forgeries, contrived to delude the credulous multitude."[1]

He turns from his historical observations to physiology, and comments on the elusive nature of healing:

> Every man's experience has taught him, that diseases thought fatal and desperate, are often surprisingly healed of themselves, by some secret and sudden effort of nature, impenetrable to the skill of man: but to ascribe this presently to a miracle, as weak and superstitious minds are apt to do; to the prayers of the living, or the intercessions of the dead; is what neither sound reason nor true religion will justify.[2]

He insists that the cures related to the pouring on of oil can be explained naturally. Many illnesses have been known to be checked by such an anointing.

He asserts that a person should be suspicious when the accounts of cures are narrated by partial, interested, weak, or credulous men. The narrators might have been either deluded or willing to delude. He concludes:

> And unless we know more precisely in this case the real bounds between nature and miracle, we cannot pay any great regard to such stories; especially when we are informed at the same time by the Christians themselves, that the same cures were performed also by Knaves and Impostors, of all sects and nations; by Heathens, Jews, and Heretics; which, according to the principles of those days, were ascribed either to the power of Daemons, or to the magical force of amulets and charms.[3]

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 204. 2. Ibid., p. 204.
3. Ibid., p. 205.

No better description of the feeble criticism offered on Middleton's discussion of miraculous healing is available than the estimation Brooke himself gives of the former's observations: "palpable evasions, false and unwarantable [sic] conclusions."[1]

The critics blast Middleton's natural explanations of the healings. They are especially wary of his remarks on the effectiveness of oil, arguing that the mystery which surrounds certain illnesses, as well as the late discovery of the effectiveness of certain medicines, argues in favor of the testimony.

A familiar argument reappears in the attack on Middleton. It is that the circumstances which surround the testimony credit it. Dodwell supports Tertullian with this kind of defense. In addition, he contends that it is improbable that Tertullian would have mentioned Severus's cure had it been a natural effect.

Another voucher which Dodwell offers for the authenticity of this incident is that the method used was Apostolic:

> . . . when we consider that there is a Text still in our Bible, which prescribes the Anointing with Oyl [sic] in the Case of supernatural Cures, that Tertullian had the Bible in his Hands, and has referred to this very Practice, it is not credible that He would have done this, if He had been speaking merely of a Physical Application in a natural Way.[2]

Severus's case provides Dodwell with still another opportunity to criticize Middleton. He examines the remarks on the heathens' pretenses at healing and suggests that the Christians could offer no better evidence for the conviction of the heathen than a display of a superior healing power. In fact, Christianity succeeded because the Christians competed with the heathens and offered genuine healings, which resulted

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 243. 2. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 216.

in conviction. The case of Severus offers a good example. Being a man of intelligence, he had no doubt approached the heathen miracle-workers, had not been healed, and in despair had called in a Christian and had been cured:

> This is the Fact, and the Presumption of his having first tried the Pretenders of his own Religion, arises with the greatest Probability from the Circumstances of the Case, from the Principles, and Practices, and Station of Severus.[1]

Dodwell asks that a great deal be granted; in fact, too much. Historical evidence is not conclusive on the presumption, probability, circumstances, principles, practices, and station of Severus, which form the basis of the argument. In fact, historical evidence seems to argue otherwise. A round of persecution arose in 202, soon after the beginning of Severus's reign, and he issued an edict forbidding conversions to Judaism or Christianity.

Dodwell takes note of these facts, but he believes that Severus's policies can be explained. Reasons of state prevented his granting an edict of toleration toward the Christians, but, "As opportunity served, He visibly favoured them, and by Example and Discourse. . . He discouraged all Prosecution of them, and even recommended them to Regard and Esteem." His edict forbidding people to turn Jew or Christian was one of those too frequent inconsistencies in persons, who, though they do not lack the judgment to discern the truth, fail to enforce it. Dodwell is convinced that, in spite of his action, Severus saw on which side the claim of supernatural power lay.

To an objective investigator, this line of defense does not

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1. Ibid., pp. 219 f. 2. Ibid., p. 221.

make a convincing case for a continuing gift of miraculous healing.

Middleton's examination of miraculous cures is superior to his opponents'. His is not without flaws, however; he does not always direct his attack to the obvious unreality in the claims. Nevertheless, his criticisms make at least these contributions to a realistic approach to the continuing miraculous powers: challenging the almost unquestioned and unexamined position that miraculous healing had continued as a standing power in the Church as long as it had served a good purpose; opening up the investigation of numerous pretenses at faith-healing, both on the part of the heathen and the Christians; calling attention to the difficulties involved in diagnosing the phenomena connected with both illness and healing; suggesting that physiological and psychological discoveries can explain much of what was once thought miraculous; and encouraging a critical attitude toward the conviction of the Fathers of Early-Church History that they possessed a gift to heal miraculously.

Middleton's most important conclusions have ultimately received wide acceptance. Although certain branches of the Church hold that a gift of miraculous healing is still available, the argument is more of theological than historical interest. An exception is Leslie Weatherhead, who maintains that the gift continued, but through neglect and disobedience, it eventually became a "lost art"[1] which only waits to be recovered. Those who today are carrying on the ministry of healing through the direct activity of God are bringing "the ancient tradition of the Church up to the reach of modern memory."[2]

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1. Leslie D. Weatherhead, Psychology, Religion and Healing (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1951), p. 487.

2. Ibid., p. 95.

The truth of the matter, however, balances more in favor of what Middleton had concluded. Neither the Scriptures nor the testimonies of the Fathers support the argument that a miraculous power to heal lasted for any length of time after the deaths of the Apostles. This conclusion has been expressed more recently by J. S. McEwen when, in the article referred to earlier, he comments on the shortcomings of the evidence:

> And what is our verdict to be? I can see only one honest conclusion to be drawn from the data we have examined--namely, that if one subtracts the exorcism of demons, there is very little evidence left of a great healing ministry in the sub-Apostolic Church. Assuming--without prejudice--the commonly accepted belief that there was a wonderful healing ministry within the lifetime of the Apostles, I think that the evidence would compel the conclusion that it practically died out with them, and left little except exorcism behind.[1]

3. Casting Out Devils, or the Cure of Demoniacs

The third gift which Middleton examines is the one he finds appearing most often in the writings of the Fathers, and advertised more than any other in the Primitive Church, the gift of casting out devils, or the cure of demoniacs.

Examining the cases described by Justin Martyr, Chrysostom, and Gergory of Nyssa, he first makes a comment or two on the symptoms described. They follow a pattern: the victim being tossed to the ground, followed by convlusive movements of the body, foaming at the mouth, voice alterations, tremors, and paralysis. He says that the symptoms fit the illness which most eighteenth-century physicians were diagnosing as epilepsy or sleeping sickness.

Commenting on the cure, he contends that one of two things made it possible for the Christians to convince people that they

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1. McEwen, op. cit., p. 140.

possessed the power of exorcism: either the imposition of hypnotic suggestion on the deranged person, or other "arts of imposture and contrivance between the parties concerned in the act."[1]

He offers several reasons for the Fathers' belief in the reality of demon-possession. For one thing, they seem to have been persuaded that they themselves were sometimes possessed and tormented by devils or evil spirits. They were convinced that demon-possession was an affliction of the ages in which they lived. They were credulous and enthusiastic, and they had preconceived and erroneous ideas about the origin and power of demons. Their prejudice led them to give hasty decisions on the matter, and their indiscriminate zeal led them to support their delusions because they considered them helpful to the expansion of Christianity. He offers a daring conclusion which he claims the history of human nature supports: "The greatest zealots in religion, or the leaders of sects and parties, whatever purity or principles they pretend to, have seldom scrupled to make use of a commodious lie, for the advancement of what they call truth."[2] The Christians are not exempt from this charge. Eminent Church Historians will admit that the Fathers use hyperbole, and that their writings contain incredible narratives.

He supports his observations, first, with a record of demon-possession related by Tertullian. In De Spectaculis, this noted Father describes how certain people who attend public shows come under the influence of the devils who perform at these spectacles:

> We have the case of the woman--the Lord Himself is witness--who went to the theatre and came back possessed. In the outcasting, accordingly, when the unclean creature

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 207. 2. Ibid., p. 208.

> was upbraided with having dared to attack a believer, he firmly replied, "And in truth I did it most righteously, for I found her in my domain." Another case, too, is well known, in which a woman had been hearing a tragedian, and on the very night she saw in her sleep a linen cloth--the actor's name being mentioned at the same time with a strong disapproval--and five days after that woman was no more.[1]

Though Tertullian calls God to be a witness to the reality of these incidents, Middleton prefers to explain them as the results of the Father's prejudice:

> . . . when we reflect on the principles of those times, and the particular warmth of Tertullian's zeal, we cannot but suspect, that the smart answer of the Devil was contrived to enforce what he was warily inculcating, the horrible sin and dangerous consequence of frequenting the public Theaters.[2]

It appears to Middleton that the exorcists followed a certain set of rules from a universal rule-book, since the descriptions bear a monotonous likeness. He also notes that the exorcists seem to have been an exclusive group and appear from the middle of the third century onwards to have been one of the inferior orders in the Church.

He gives attention to the fact that the Fathers believed that the Jews and the heathen had possessed the gift of exorcism. Most men of common sense admit, he says, that the Jewish and Gentile exorcists were knaves and impostors who were trying to keep people from turning Christian. Yet the Fathers ascribed a demonic power to numerous magicians and wandering jugglers. If the Christians were deluded by these pretenders, how much more would their prejudices have disposed them to support their own impostors. Or if they saw through the cheats and recognized that the impostors had made an impression, they might have been tempted to cheat a little and to have "set up rival powers of their own

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1. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., XI, 31 f.

2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 209.

in opposition to those of their adversaries, in hopes of beating them at their own weapons.

Examining Origen's and Jerome's stories on the exorcism of cattle, Middleton finds the narratives hard to believe. He quotes at length from the latter's life of Hilarion, in which it is related that animals possessed with demons were brought to him daily, and he exorcised them. Though Jerome had claimed that the Holy Spirit had guided his writing the biography of the Monk, he surely had mistaken the guidance, Middleton inserts. His fantastic narratives reveal that:

> Out of his zeal and warm affection to the Monkish Order, which he professed, and from a desire to advance its credit in the world, he either wholly invented, or at least wilfully propagated all these extravagant tales, which he himself could not possibly believe.[2]

At this point Middleton has completed his preliminary examination of the testimonies. The rest of his discussion consists of five observations which he recommends to the attention of the reader. Before these are discussed, the criticism of the remarks he has made so far will be noted.

The most serious charge against his analysis was that he had hurt the case in Scripture for the curing of demoniacs. If we believe the Scriptures, his critics naïvely ask, what reason is there to disbelieve in the exorcisms recorded by the Church Fathers? If we do not believe the Church Fathers, neither can we believe that the exorcisms spoken of in the Bible happened.

The objection does not stand. Middleton assumed a reality

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1. Ibid., p. 213. 2. Ibid., p. 215.

behind the demon-possession which Jesus and the Apostles and first disciples had encountered, and he made no effort to rule out this phenomenon as organic illness. His position corresponds with the view expressed more recently by William Manson in a paper entitled, "Principalities and Powers." Manson says: "The supernatural demonological element in the gospel is not a mere veneer. It is not a temporary trapping which can be stripped away from the gospel. It is engrained in its very substance. It is needed to bring out its sense."[1]

Neither can Middleton be charged with believing that Jesus and those who had had the power to exorcise had been deceived or had attempted to deceive, as he maintains the Fathers did. He assumes at least as much as Vincent Taylor accepts in his comments on Jesus's exorcising a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue at Capernaum[2]:

> Jesus shares the ideas of his time, but so far transcends them that by a commanding word alone, without the use of magical practices, He casts out the unclean spirit. He himself is the subject of the story. His teaching and accent of authority, the supernatural aura of His person, His reaction to evil, His ringing command and sentence of expulsion--these are the points which arrest the attention of the reader.[3]

Besides criticizing Middleton for hurting the Scriptural case, his critics had another stock reply. They argued that exorcism had continued because it had served a good purpose. Demon-possession was both a form of punishment on man's wickedness, and an opportunity

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1. William Manson, "Principalities and Powers: The Scriptural Background of the Work of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels," Studiorus Novi Testamenti Societas, Bulletin III(1952), 15.

2. Mark 1:21-28.

3. Taylor, op. cit., p. 171.

to manifest the authority of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Dodwell holds:

> Both of these reasons would lead us to presume, that they [the gifts of exorcism] lasted till the Publick [sic] profession of the Gospel had recommended the Professors to the Favour of their Maker; and till the Victory of Christ over all the Powers of Hell was made visible by the Publick [sic] Extirpation of all Idolatrous and Diabolical Worship.[1]

Since Jesus had promised that believers would cast out demons, it may be reasonably presumed, he continues, that the gift lasted in the Church till the religion of Jesus "became the Religion of Rulers."[2]

Continuing with presumptive arguments, Dodwell lists four considerations which he believes guarantee that the power to exorcise had continued.

First, he analyzes the nature of demon-possession. It is perverted supernatural power. Overcoming it with a power superior to that of the demons "might well be considered as the most considerable Miracle itself, and as such be most frequently proposed for the Conviction of Mankind."[3] Second, the Christian claims to exorcise would force the heathens into competition, and the outcome would "scarce fail of ending in the Satisfaction of every impartial Enquirer."[4] Third, the challenge which the Christians put to the heathen to come and observe their exorcisms credits the testimony. It provided the Christians an opportunity to display their talent, and their exorcisms produced a "great Benefit which thereby redounded to the most distressed part of Mankind."[5] Finally, he observes that this gift alone seems to have been common to all Christians. All

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1. W. Dodwell, op. cit., p. 230. 2. Ibid., p. 232.
3. Ibid., p. 236. 4. Ibid., p. 236. 5. Ibid., p. 239.

these reasons put together show that the Christian exorcists "understood the Nature and Use of the Endowments that They were blessed with, and made a wise and proper Application of them."[1] Since this gift was powerful in the ministry of Jesus and His first Apostles, it must have been powerful and convincing in the life of the Early Church.

Dodwell was apparently satisfied that this piece of rationalism successfully refutes Middleton's preliminary observations on the gift of casting out demons.

However, the arguments are a poor match. Dodwell's suggestions on the value of exorcism in giving birth to belief are not in the realm of fact, and, therefore, as Middleton argues, unavailable for empirical investigation. One cannot find impartial evidence that great numbers of believers were made as a result of exorcisms.

The challenge which the Christian exorcists gave, and the commonness of the gift, are arguments that likewise crumble before a similar bar of empirical investigation. Middleton offers several reasonable suggestions from human nature why persons could be intoxicated with the delusion that they could exorcise or could be deceived by others' exorcisms, and he offers acceptable explanations for the seeming commonness of the phenomenon. In fact, one of his criticisms is that it was too common.

The argument that the gift was used discriminately is debatable. Exorcising cattle can hardly be considered a "wise and proper" use.

Though Middleton be exonerated from hurting the Scriptural case for exorcism, and though his conclusions be more scientifically arrived at than those of his critics, and be truer to what the case

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1. Ibid., p. 243.

actually was in the Early Church, yet he cannot be excused so quickly from oversimplifying the Fathers' convictions. He states the matter too superficially when he accuses them of unscrupulous motives in conceiving and nurturing the delusion of exorcism. In a sense, the Fathers had exorcism thrust upon them, and the theory that demon-possession was a peculiar disorder of, and served a particular purpose in, the New Testament times explains in part the position which the Early Churchmen took toward it. They had a memory and they had a written record. From the example of Jesus and His Apostles, as well as from the Scriptural support which they supposed to be genuine--the closing verses of Mark and Paul's remarks--the Fathers conceived of themselves as possessing a miraculous power to combat Satan's destructive agents at work against Christ's kingdom.

Besides the authorization which they supposed they had from Scripture, and besides their conviction that demon-possession had continued in the Early Church with the same force as in the New Testament, there were other reasons why the Early Churchmen presumed that they could exorcise. The age in which the Church was planted had peculiar afflictions as a result of changing cultural patterns and religious beliefs, and the Church felt the need of doing something about them.

As Harnack points out, the soil of the immediate post-Apostolic years was rich in the minerals which support credulity, and therefore nurtured the belief in demon-possession:

> . . . the extraordinary spread of belief in demons, and the numerous outbursts of demonic disease, are to be referred to the combined influence of such well-known factors as the dwindling of faith in the old religions, which characterized the Imperial age, together with the rise of a feeling on the part of the individual that he was free and independent, and therefore flung upon his inmost nature and his own responsibility. Free from any control or restraint of tradition,

> the individual wandered here and there amid the lifeless, fragmentary, and chaotic debris of traditions belonging to a world in progress of dissolution; now he would pick up this, now that, only to discover himself at last driven, often by fear and hope, to find a deceptive support or a new disease in the absurdest of them all.[1]

As he goes on to comment, the Christians were quickly recognized as exorcists, and the heathens as well as the Jews were likewise celebrated. The former quickly discovered that "exorcism formed one very powerful method of their mission and propaganda."[2] Like Middleton, Harnack suggests that the elusiveness of the disorder no doubt contributed to the Fathers' successes with it:

> Inevitable self-deceptions, cunning actions, and the most abject passivity form a sinister combination. But they complete our idea of a psychical disease which usually betrays extreme susceptibility to "suggestion," and therefore, for the time being often defies any scientific analysis, leaving it open to anyone to think of special and mysterious forces in operation.[3]

Though it be admitted with Middleton that the Fathers were credulous and had an enthusiastic disposition, that they were mistaken in analyzing certain abnormal behavior as possession, that they were mistaken in their belief that they had the powers of exorcism, and that they were deluded by the results of their exorcising activities, it does not necessarily follow that their claims were used as a convenient falsehood to advance truth. Their exorcisms could have been the effects of credulity without having been the tools of deliberate deception. Harnack again offers a reasonable suggestion:

> In the belief in demons, as that belief dominated the Christian world in the second and third centuries, it is easy to detect features which stamp it as a reactionary movement hostile to contemporary culture. Yet it must not be forgotten

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1. Harnack, op. cit., I, 157 f. 2. Ibid., p. 160.
3. Ibid., p. 154.

> that in the heart of it lay hid a moral and consequently a spiritual advance, viz., in a quickened sense of evil, as well as in a recognition of the power of sin and of its dominion in the world. Hence it was that a mind of such high culture as Tertullian's could abandon itself to this belief in demons.[1]

Whereas Middleton's critics analyzed the Fathers' quickened sense of evil as the actual effects of increased activity by the powers of evil, he interpreted it as the fruits of credulity. How much it was the one and how much the other will have to remain speculation at this point, first, because there is not sufficient evidence to settle the matter, and second, because the controversy in the eighteenth century was concerned only with determining whether the Fathers were justified in claiming to cure what was believed to have been demon-possession. Middleton's critics had thus far in the discussion produced nothing that contradicts his position that the Early Churchmen were not.

The discussion on the testimony on casting out demons, as noted earlier, did not conclude with the remarks already examined. Middleton continues his investigation with five observations.

The first is that the uniformity in the accounts of exorcisms leads to the conclusion that the testimonies are copies of an original story. Rather than offering a fresh approach, relating different details on the time and setting of the exorcisms, the witnesses follow a sameness of detail, indicating that the pattern of the earlier testimony was being followed.

This theory is not the best explanation of the monotony in the Fathers' accounts. The simplicity of the exorcising formulas

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1. Ibid., p. 167.

found in Scripture could reasonably account for the sameness of detail in the later testimony.

Middleton's second observation is that the persons who were possessed were called by some early Christians Ἐγγαστριμύθοι, or ventriloquists, because they were believed to have spoken out of the belly and through the navel. The authority for this statement is the historian, Bingham, plus a reference from a disputed work attributed to Justin Martyr. Middleton inserts that the practices of ventriloquists enable one to imagine what kind of dialogue might have been carried on between them and an exorcist. The two could perform together "so as to delude the most sensible and sagacious of their audience, prepossessed with the belief of these diabolical possessions, and void of all suspicion, that such effects could possibly be produced by any human art or natural cause."[1]

This observation is colorful, but not as valuable as Middleton imagines. As Brooke notes, the evidence for it is thin. The work attributed to Justin, from which the reference is taken, is probably not genuine, and therefore of little value as evidence.

The third observation deals with the ineffectiveness and impermanency of the cure. The testimony from antiquity makes it obvious that exorcists could not cure many demoniacs, and that many so-called cures were only temporary, and were but the termination of a fit. Some victims who were not relieved, under certain circumstances--depending upon the severity of the case--nevertheless received baptism and were admitted to the Holy Communion. In some cases they were denied the sacraments, and were not even permitted to participate in

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 217 f.

the daily prayers. Middleton's comment on the evidence of the exorcists' failures is:

> Wherefore we may reasonably conclude, that it was nothing else, but a false mimickry of that genuine power, which was exercised by our Lord, and conferred afterwards on his Apostles; a power which never did it's [sic] work by halves or left it's [sic] cure imperfect.[1]

This observation has merit. One of the most noticeable differences between the miracles performed by Jesus and His Apostles and those performed by the post-Apostolic miracle-workers is the effectiveness of the cure. The evidence from both heathen and Christian writers suggests that in many of the later exorcisms, the cures did not last.

J. S. McEwen, in the article referred to earlier, corroborates the observation Middleton had made:

> There is indeed some evidence to the effect that the exorcisms of the Early Church were often not permanent--and that the same persons sometimes had to be exorcised repeatedly. That is just what we should expect: for the suppression of a symptom by suggestion--however hallowed the means by which the suggestion is applied--is in no sense a cure.[2]

As McEwen points out, the evidence suggests that some of the exorcisms showed permanent results. He connects the fact that the genuine cures were claimed early in the history of Christian exorcism with the fact that more of the content of the Christian Faith was recited then. The earlier exorcising formulas were "genuine declarations of the core of the Gospel message, commended to the mind, heart, and will of the neurotic sufferer, by the earnest and loving Christian brother who was treating him."[3] Genuine conversions must have

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1. Ibid., p. 219. 2. McEwen, op. cit., p. 143.
3. Ibid., p. 144.

resulted frequently, he believes, and genuine conversion would, if there were no disturbing neuroses connected with the affliction, result in effective healing. As time passed, genuine healings lapsed into superficial popular exorcisms.

Instead of censuring the Fathers for their exorcising efforts, as Middleton does, McEwen comments:

> We cannot blame the Early Christians overmuch for this. They sincerely believed that by these exorcisms they were scoring resounding victories over the Kingdom of Evil. It must have given them an intoxicating sense of power over Satan's legions, when they watched what they took to be a devil go shrieking out of some poor neurotic. Alas-- that the devil is not so easily driven out of the human heart as they fondly fancied![1]

Middleton's fourth observation is on a reference from the historian, Bingham, to the effect that certain demoniacs were kept within the walls of a particular church building for demonstration purposes. This reserve of demoniacs helps account for the invitations extended the public to attend a demonstration of exorcism. The miracle-workers had a supply of demon-ridden victims, "always ready for the shew [sic]; tried and disciplined by their Exorcists, to an habit of groaning and howling, and to give proper answers to all quaestions [sic] which should be demanded of them."[2]

There is a weakness of evidence for this observation. Nevertheless, Middleton draws the conclusion from it that exorcism was an imposture.

Brooke has reason to call attention to the superficiality of the research at this point, but he attenuates his criticism when he goes on to say that if Middleton had not been so negligent or ingen-

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1. Ibid., p. 144. 2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 220.

uously motivated, he would have discovered that his authority, Bingham, does not say that the Church early constituted exorcists into an order.

Here he is referring to Middleton's fifth and final observation, which is his interpretation of the action which the Church took to regulate the power and the activity of the exorcists. The Council of Laodicea in 367 restricted the exorcising privilege to bishop-appointed persons. Middleton notes that William Whiston had interpreted this action as a presumptuous attempt to control divine power, and the reason why the gift of exorcising was withdrawn. But he is convinced that the action was a result, rather than a cause, of the withdrawal. The licentious practice of this gift by pretenders and enthusiasts brought such scandal on Christianity that the leaders of the Church were forced to act:

> For that this was really the case, is manifestly shewn [sic] by the event: since the exercise of this gift was no sooner subjected to any regulation, even by those who favored and desired to support it, than it gradually decreased and expired.[1]

This observation is more effective than the one preceding. It again shows Middleton appraising the action of the Church more realistically than his critics. They hide the fact that imposture forced the Church to act, behind the supposition that the cessation of the need for this gift forced the Church's hand. The fact is, Harnack says, that exorcism was degenerating, and the Christians were partly at fault:

> From the middle of the second century onwards, the cry was often raised against the Christians, that they were jugglers and necromancers, and not a few of them were certainly to blame for such a charge. Cures of demon-possession, practised by unspiritual men as a profession, must

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1. Ibid., p. 222.

> have produced a repellant impression on more serious people, despite the attractive power which they did exercise(Tert., Apol., xxiii., "Christianos facere consuerunt"). But there was really no chance of the matter being cleared up in the third century. Christians and pagans alike were getting more and more entangled in the belief in demons. In their dogmatic and their philosophy of religion, polytheism certainly became more and more attenuated as a sublime monotheism was evolved; but in their practical life they plunged more helplessly than ever into the abysses of an imaginary world of spirits.[1]

Middleton's conclusion that the miraculous power of exorcism did not continue after the time of Jesus and His Apostles makes more sense than the efforts of his critics to defend it. The reality of the New Testament facts connected with it being accepted, the support for Middleton's position is: the mystery of the phenomenon, the difficulty of analyzing the symptoms and explaining the causes of maladies which were thought to be demon-possession, the peculiarities and crude analyses in the Primitive Christian testimony, the credulity of the period under consideration, the revolutionary nature of the times, the zeal of the first Christians, the latent possibilities of deception, and the regulatory action of the Church. By not hesitating to apply these observations to the testimony of the Fathers, Middleton arrived at a reasonable appraisal of the case of a continuing gift of exorcism.

4. Prophetic Visions, Ecstatic Trances, and the Discovery of Men's Hearts

Middleton lumps together in his fourth category three miraculous gifts which seem closely related: prophetic visions, ecstatic trances, and the discovery of men's hearts. He finds these were prominent at the end of the second and the beginning of the third century.

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1. Harnack, op. cit., p. 180.

Cyprian and Tertullian especially claim them.

The testimony of Cyprian which figures prominently with Middleton is in the epistle, "To the Clergy, Concerning Certain Presbyters Who Had Rashly Granted Peace to the Lapsed before the Persecution Had been Appeased, and Without the Privity of the Bishops." As the title indicates, the Father had written the Epistle to check the actions of certain presbyters and deacons who, unmindful of their discipline, had exercised their priestly privileges too leniently and had too hastily begun to communicate with weak Christians. Not only were the ecclesiastical leaders acting contrary to the command of Scripture and the practice of tradition, but they were dishonoring the martyrs and the confessors. The action of the clergy was being reproved in prophetic and ecstatic visions that youth were having. Cyprian writes:

> . . . the divine rebuke does not cease to chastise us night and day. For besides the visions of the night, by day also, the innocent age of boys is among us filled with the Holy Spirit, seeing in an ecstasy with their eyes, and hearing and speaking those things whereby the Lord condescends to warn and instruct us. And you shall hear all things when the Lord, who bade me withdraw, shall bring me back again to you. In the meanwhile, let those certain ones among you who are rash and incautious and boastful, and who do not regard man, at least fear God, knowing that, if they shall presevere still in the same course, I shall use that power of admonition which the Lord bids me use.[1]

Middleton believes that the prophetic activity of which Cyprian speaks as an ecstatic experience fits Tertullian's description of the medium by which prophecy is given. In De Anima this Father discusses what Adam had in him from his creation which was spiritual. Was it a spirit of prophecy? Tertullian asks. He

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1. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., VIII, 39 f.

believes not: ". . . this only came on him afterwards, when God infused into him the ecstasy, or spiritual quality, in which prophecy consists."[1]

In addition to the testimony of the Fathers, Middleton also refers to heathen and later Christian writings to point out that ecstasy and prophecy are spoken of together. He cites Philo, who holds that when the divine light enters the mind, the human element is shelved, for the immortal and the mortal cannot coexist. A similar position is maintained by the senior Henry Dodwell, who comments in his dissertations on Cyprian that visions were given to the young and dreams to the old, since the visions were accompanied by such agitations that a strong physical frame was necessary in order to endure the experience.

Middleton traces the Fathers' preoccupation with prophetic trances to the heretic, Montanus, a mid second-century mystic of Asia Minor who became obsessed with the idea that he was the prophetic organ of the Holy Spirit commissioned to instruct Christians facing the distresses and tensions of the period. Two women, Priscilla and Maximilla, joined him as official prophetesses.

Those who followed him were called Montanists, and their influence soon spread throughout the Empire. They had ecstatic spells, during which they uttered wild prophecies and predictions. At first, its authoritative methods, its severe disciplines, and its extravagant claims attracted enthusiastic Christians to Montanism, but eventually the movement fell into contempt. Middleton suggests that it was attractive to a temperament such as tertullian's.

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1. Ibid., XV, 460.

It is easy to imagine how he "might be imposed upon by the craft of these ecstatic visionaries; and by the warmth of his temper and force of his prejudices, be drawn to espouse any delusion, that flattered his particular zeal and favorite opinions."[1]

As his critics point out, Middleton does not fairly present Tertullian's case. He quotes from works written after the Father had embraced Montanism.

Middleton says next that the explanation of Cyprian's delusion by prophetic impostures is to be found in his character. Though he was more acute and of a more sober mind than Tertullian, he was also fond of power and Episcopal authority, a man "whose character would tempt us to suspect that he was the inventor, rather than the believer of such idle stories; and the director, rather than the dupe of such senseless visionaries."[2] Cyprian leans too heavily for support in matters of doctrine and discipline on heavenly visions and revelations.

Middleton introduces testimonies to support his conclusions. In a letter to Caecilius, Cyprian insists that divine instruction had led him to advocate the mixing of water and wine in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper:

> Nor must you think, dearest brother, that I am writing my own thoughts or man's; or that I am boldly assuming this to myself of my own voluntary will, since I always hold my mediocrity with lowly and modest moderation. But when anything is prescribed by the inspiration and command of God (Deo aspirante & mandante praecipitur), it is necessary that a faithful servant should obey the Lord, acquitted by all of assuming anything arrogantly to himself, seeing that he is constrained to fear offending the Lord unless he does what is commanded.[3]

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 226 f. 2. Ibid., p. 227.
3. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., VIII, 209.

Again, writing to the clergy and the people, he comments on how by divine instruction, and without waiting for the voice of the presbyters, he had been led to make an ecclesiastical appointment: "For you must know that I have been admonished and instructed by divine condescension, that Numidicus the presbyter should be appointed."[1]

After citing one or two other examples of this type of claim, Middleton concludes:

> This then seems to be the meaning of Cyprian's diligence in the use of visions, that whenever he thought fit to exert his Episcopal authority, without the previous consent of his Clergy and people, he might obviate their murmurs, by alleging a divine command for it.[2]

The event which Middleton considers the most exciting effect of Cyprian's visions is his flight from persecution. It has been alluded to in one of the foregoing quotes.[3] His attempt to apologize for his action by saying that a vision had prompted him is, to Middleton, "nothing else without doubt, but a mere fiction, contrived for the purpose of quieting the scandal that was raised by his flight, and is in effect confuted by himself."[4]

Middleton is apparently referring to Cyprian's remark that a fellow churchman had counseled him in this matter:

> . . . it seemed to me better, still to preserve my retreat and quiet for a while, with a view to other advantages connected with the peace and safety of us all; . . . . Tertullus. . . was the author of this counsel: that I should be cautious and moderate, and not rashly trust myself into the sight of the public; and especially that I should beware of that place where I had been so often inquired for and sought after.[5]

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1. Ibid., p. 99. 2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 230. 3. Cf. p. 146.

4. Ibid., p. 231. 5. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., VIII, 20.

Dionysius, the Bishop of Alexandria around the middle of the third century, also claimed immediate revelations. Like Cyprian, he fled persecution on the pretense of a divine command. He affirmed also that a voice from heaven straightened him out on the matter of reading certain heretical books. He was to read so he could refute them.

This incident reminds Middleton of one of Jerome's visions in which he was threatened and scourged for reading heathen publications. Jerome was as able a man as Dionysius, and, therefore, it is strange that one's reading should be approved and the other's disapproved. Observing that Jerome's editor criticizes him for publishing his silly tale, Middleton makes the sweeping conclusion:

> But if Jerom's [sic] vision deserved to be treated by his contemporaries as a fiction, I see no reason, either from the nature of the thing, or the use which is made of it, or the character of the persons concerned, why the visions of Cyprian and Dionysius should not merit the same treatment.[1]

He notes that certain heather writers had ridiculed the Christians for publicizing their visions. If this ridicule were not enough to render the claims suspicious, the motive behind them would:

> . . . whatever ground there might be in those primitive ages, either to reject or to allow the authority of those visions, yet from all the accounts of them that remain to us in these days, there seems to be the greatest reason to suspect that they are all contrived, or authorised at least, by the leading men of the Church, for the sake of moderating and governing with more ease, the unruly spirit of the populace, in those times of danger and difficulty.[2]

Another reason to suspect the visions is the use made of them:

> For they are generally applied, to excuse the conduct of particular persons, in some instances of it liable to censure; or to enforce some particular doctrine or discipline, warmly expressed by some, and not well relished by others, or to confirm things not onely [sic] trifling and frivolous, but sometimes even superstitious, and hurtful to true religion.[3]

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 233. 2. Ibid., pp. 235 f.
3. Ibid., p. 236.

Middleton is convinced that the Fathers were deceived by and deceiving with the gifts he has been examining in this fourth category. The clergymen were guilty both of forgery and of taking advantage of a bad situation. Men who were episcopate-enthusiasts, like Cyprian, played upon the superstitions and ignorance of the day, using strange stories like the ones quoted to support the disciplines of the Church. They dressed up abnormalities and combined a quickened sense of guilt and a dread of God's judgment in such a way as to convince the unsuspecting public that they were the organs of prophecy.

Middleton finds no reason to give credit to the claims, and he finds several reasons for discrediting them.

It is obvious by now that those who engaged in the discussion on this gift considered the prophetic claims of the Early Church and ecstatic experience to be interrelated. Middleton believes that this is the way the Fathers had understood the matter. He notes, however, that they disagree on how close the relationship is. Certain divines, namely Epiphanius, Jerome, and Eusebius, contend against the Montanists that the true prophets never spoke while under an ecstatic spell. Others indicate that the Christians as well as the heretics prophesied in a state of ecstasy. Further, "It appears to have been the current opinion in those earlier days, that the Prophets also of the Old Testament received and uttered their revelations in ecstasy."[1]

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1. Ibid., p. 237. Cf. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., II, 384, where Athenagoras says that Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets, "lifted in ecstasy above the natural operations of their minds by the impulses of the Divine Spirit, uttered things with which they were inspired, the Spirit making use of them as a flute-player breathes into his flute."

Two tensions seem to have exerted more pressure on Middleton's thinking than the testimony itself, when he was discussing the matter of the marriage of prophecy and ecstasy. One was his wariness of the doctrine of verbal inspiration. The other was his concern for the protection of genuine prophecy from an ecstatic connotation. He feels that when certain revered Fathers speak of the recipients of prophecy as having been so much under the control of the Spirit that they were deprived of their senses, they jeopardize the Scriptures by making every item of prophecy seem inspired and every prophet divinely intoxicated.

Brooke argues rather effectively that there is not a close identification of prophesy and ecstasy in the testimony of the Fathers. He contends that the self-abandonment of which Cyprian speaks as the condition of certain prophecies was not the madness Middleton makes it out to be, and that Tertullian's testimony is unacceptable because he was voicing his Montanist convictions. He agrees that the Montanists introduced the frenzied method of prophesying, but the true prophets "calmly and sedately received and understood whatever was revealed to them."[1]

One testimony which Brooke effectively introduces is that of Apollinaris, Bishop of Hierapolis in the latter part of the second century. The Bishop calls the Montanist's prophetic pretensions something new in the Christian Church. He insists that their abnormal state of ecstasy is a mark that they are false. He comments on a Montanist's behavior:

> For while he begins with voluntary ignorance, he ends with involuntary madness of soul, as has been stated. But they cannot show any prophet under either the Old or the New [Covenant] who was moved by the Spirit after this manner, neither Agabus nor Judas nor Silas nor the daughters of Philip, nor Ammia in Philadelphia nor Quadratus, nor can

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 261.

they make their boast of any others whatever not belonging to their number. [1]

Brooke goes on to argue that when Athenagoras and Justin Martyr testified, they were not referring to an ecstatic spell, but wrote in keeping with the words of II Peter 1:21: " . . . no prophecy ever came by the impulse of men, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

In Brooke's defense of this gift, the Primitive Churchmen move up to a level of inspiration with the prophets of Scripture. He argued that the difference between ecstatic and non-ecstatic prophecy is that the latter is given by immediate inspiration, that the prophetic revelations of Scripture were not given during an ecstatic spell, and that the Early Churchmen prophesied in the same way as the prophets of Scripture. However, he could not present testimony to show that the former were the instruments of prophetic utterances which are of an Apostolic caliber.

Just as he could not prove his point, so neither did Middleton have grounds for arguing so dogmatically on the marriage of prophecy and ecstasy in the writings of the Fathers.

Deserting the paths of scientific criticism, Middleton's critics advanced the rational arguments for this gift continuing. They contended that God has frequently made divine impressions on men's minds and given them immediate revelations. The purpose was to signify a person's extraordinary authority. Cyprian was defended on this basis. Because of his station in the Church and his native piety and virtue, it is reasonable that he should have had direct, special admonitions

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1. Eusebius, op. cit., p. 162.

and instructions concerning the discipline and government of the Church. Furthermore, his visions accord with the principles which determine the validity of divine impressions, prophetic visions, and extraordinary illuminations. This validity is determined, according to Brooke, by:

> . . . considering the Circumstances of the times, in which they are said to have been vouchsafed to men; the Importance of the occasions, for which they were given; and the Integrity of the persons, by whom they are related.[1]

He continues with an elaborate argument. If Cyprian alone had claimed these extraordinary gifts, his testimony could be questioned:

> But on the contrary, when it is known to have been usual for the Spirit of God, thus to manifest itself to the Christian Church, in the days of the Apostles; when it is considered, that the important exigencies of the Church in general, or of some persons in particular, made these extraordinary communications of the Holy Ghost then necessary; when it is seen, that the same important exigencies recurred in the time of Cyprian; and consequently, that there was the same necessity for the continuance of them; and when it is found, that the actual continuance of them is frequently, solemnly, and universally attested by all the Ecclesiastical Writers from the days of the Apostles down to the very Cyprianic Age, and even for sometime afterwards; these several circumstances, thus united together, are a strong confirmation of the truth of the Cyprianic Visions: Especially when we reflect farther, that the authority of St. Cyprian himself is no otherwise liabled to suspicion, except from such reasons, only, as might be urged in the same manner, even if his relations were true.[2]

The occasion and circumstances propitious to visions, prophecies, and divine impressions no more qualify as evidence for these gifts continuing than they argue for the case of continuing miracles in general. The reply which contends for them because of the situation which prevailed in the days of Jesus and His Apostles

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 269. 2. Ibid., p. 270.

and pleads the exigencies of the Early Church is weak. The argument of exigency has already been shown to be disputable, the more reasonable conclusion being that the need for certain gifts did not continue with the same degree of command. On the other hand, as Middleton observed, the need for others still exists, but they are unavailable.

Another facet of the reply to Middleton's examination of this category of miraculous powers is Dodwell's censure of him for neglecting the gift of the discovery of men's hearts. He feels that the evidence for it contributes something to the position that miracles continued.

Toll entered this argument in defense of Middleton. Noting that Irenaeus and Tertullian claim supernatural intuition, he regards their testimony a sufficient indication that the Early Christians thought that they had possessed it. Yet, there is no evidence that the Apostles had it. In fact, their prayer in Acts 1:24, "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen," indicates otherwise:

> This is not only a manifest exclusion of themselves from all Pretence to the Power of inspecting Hearts, but an indirect Appropriation of this Attribute to the supreme Being alone. My Reason, I confess, such as it is, leads me to believe, that God has always reserved this Point of knowledge to himself; Man could never arrive at it by his own natural Abilities, and I meet with no certain Monument that it was ever communicated to Man.[1]

Granting that Jesus had this power, but unwilling to grant that the Apostles were endowed with it, Toll says that it is unthinkable that their successors had greater powers; the most that can be granted is that the sub-Apostolic Christians had powers equal to their

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1. Frederick Toll, A Defence of Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry Against Mr. Dodwell's Free Answer(London: 1749), p. 71.

predecessors. The only inference which he can draw from the testimony is that the Fathers believed the claims to this gift "upon the Reports of common Fame without examining into their Foundation, or having been assured of their Truth in a single Instance upon the Testimony of their own Senses."[1]

Dodwell questions Toll's assumption that this gift was not included as a part of the commission and powers of the Apostles. Its possession is implied. The Apostles had supernatural gifts which are not listed in any Scriptural catalogue of extraordinary powers. Besides, several references in Scripture deal with reading men's hearts. Jesus could do it, and ordinary men needed to. Because of these facts, it is consistent and reasonable to suppose that the successors of the Apostles did.

Dodwell's reasoning exposes the flaws which keep reappearing in the replies to Middleton. There is a willingness to accept testimony which has an air of fiction as if it were indisputable fact. Where testimony is lacking, the tendency of the traditional theologians is to assume without evidence that expediency called forth miraculous powers. Where testimony is available, the practice is to clothe the fiction with a garment which purports to dress it up as fact. The garment is thin, however, and fails to conceal the poverty of the testimony or the questionable motivation underneath it.

One thread of testimony which neither Middleton nor those involved in the controversy make adequate use of in duscussing the gifts in this fourth category is Eusebius's comments on Montanism. The passage, part of which has already been quoted in this chapter,[2]

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1. Ibid., pp. 72 f. 2. Pp. 152 f.

does more than refute the Montanist principle that a true prophet is caught up into a state of ecstasy. It speaks of the cessation of the genuine prophetic gift and goes on to contend from the reference in Scripture to the effect that it would continue among believers, that its failure in Montanism indicates the heretical nature of the movement. A part of the passage follows:

> For if, as they say, the women in Montanus's train succeeded to the prophetical gift after Quadratus and Ammia of Philadelphia, let them show which of their number, who were followers of Montanus and the women, succeeded to it. For the Apostle lays it down that the prophetical gift ought to continue in the whole Church until the final coming. But they cannot produce anyone, though it is the fourteenth year or thereabouts since the death of Maximilla.[1]

In his Studies in Early Church History, C. H. Turner suggests the following interpretation of the above passage:

> . . . 'the whole' is opposed to the individual prophets of the Montanists, and it is perhaps implied that each community had its share of the Prophetic charisma in the person of those who, in the language of the Didache (xv. 1) 'themselves also minister to you the ministry of the Prophets and Teachers,' the permanent local ministry of the 'bishops and deacons.'[2]

Turner points out that after the middle of the first century, the prophets were not regarded as a special order in the Church. By "prophets," the Fathers of the second century meant those of the Old Testament. Commenting on the fact that Justin Martyr and others spoke of them after the middle of the second century, Turner says, "The existence even of individuals who were simply prophets is at least a precarious supposition."[3] The anti-Montanist

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1. Eusebius, op. cit., p. 162.

2. Cuthbert Hamilton Turner, Studies in Early Church History (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 23.

3. Ibid., p. 16.

literature assumes that they were extinct. When Eusebius mentions that the prophetical gift distinguishes Quadratus and the daughters of Philip, he is speaking of contemporaries of the Apostolic Fathers, Turner points out. His conclusion is, "We arrive again in this way at about the same limit of 150 A.D. for the cessation of prophets in the Church."[1]

Because the document, the Didache, had not yet been discovered, Middleton would probably have hesitated to admit that genuine prophets were around as late as 150. Aside from his reasoning in the Free Inquiry with regard to the scarcity of the testimony, he might have pointed to the general and obscure nature of Eusebius's remarks. No details of the prophecies are given. The testimony is ambiguous and indefinite; it abounds in expressions like, "It is recorded," "This is how they say it happened," and, "Perhaps it was not thus."

Not having access to the Didache, Middleton failed to observe, as Turner did, that the prophetic charismata are perhaps implied in the ministerial orders of the Church at the beginning of the second century, though the possession of such gifts did not distinguish a particular order. This position receives support from Bettenson, when he says:

> . . . there is no suggestion in the New Testament of a ministerial authority derived from the gift of prophecy, nor of any distinction between 'charismatic' and ordained ministries; in fact, ordination is spoken of as conveying a charisma(2 Tim. i. 6.). And the Didache does not show a threefold ministry of apostles, prophets, teachers, but describes itinerant prophets who teach, and who may be called apostles.[2]

Being the objective examiner that he was, Middleton would undoubtedly have admitted on the basis of the evidence of the Didache

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1. Ibid., p. 17. 2. Bettenson, op. cit., p. 10.

that prophets blessed with the charisma of which Bettenson speaks--conveyed upon ordination--functioned for a while after the Apostles' times, but the fruits of the gift did not continue to be produced in the form of an extraordinary power of revelation, such as that with which the Fathers claimed to be blessed or which they ascribed to others.

5. Expounding the Scripture or the Mysteries of God

Middleton finds in the writings of the Fathers a claim to a gift of divine inspiration to interpret the Scriptures and expound the mysteries of God. However, his feeling about this gift is that, "There is not the least trace of it to be found in any age of the Church, from the days of the Apostles."[1] Historical facts refute the claim. During those days when it was being testified to, "A most senseless, extravagant, and enthusiastic method of expounding prevailed."[2] In contrast, more recent interpretations of Scripture, at a time when extraordinary gifts are admittedly ceased, are clear and rational.

Justin Martyr is introduced as the one who most frequently claimed this gift. Reasserting the position that it had never been available to the writers in the Church after the times of the Apostles, Middleton says that this Father had no better reason to claim it than anybody else. He observes, in addition, that Justin's fancy interpretations of Scripture can be accounted for by a misguided zeal, which often mistakes divine inspiration:

> It is a common case with men of great piety, zealously persuaded of the truth and high importance of any religious doctrine, to think it reasonable, that God should interpose himself miraculously in favor of it, when it happens to be opposed by any earthly power, and in danger of being oppressed:

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 342. 2. Ibid., p. 243.

> and when they are thus prepared by their prejudices, to expect a divine interposition, they listen to every pretension of that sort, which craft or wild enthusiasm can devise, without allowing their reason to examine it, or suggest the suspicion of a fraud.[1]

The replies to Middleton repeated the thesis that had been maintained in the earlier vindication of Justin: the Father makes no claim to such a gift. Brooke finds no clearly defined reference to it in all ecclesiastical history. Defending the Fathers as expositors, he admits that they offered some forced and whimsical interpretations of Scripture, but it is unreasonable and groundless to conclude therefrom, "that a most senseless, extravagant, and enthusiastic method prevailed."[2]

In the Vindication Middleton defended himself against those who had said that Justin and others had understood the gift of interpreting Scripture as ordinary. He contradicts himself, insisting that Justin used charis to mean an extraordinary assistance of the Holy Spirit, after having already insisted that the word can imply either an ordinary or extraordinary grace. Yet, he accuses Dodwell of contradiction in saying that Justin's interpretations came out of his own reason, and at the same time saying that "this Assistance of the blessed Spirit is a Power added to the Strength of Nature, and it may in some Sense be called supernatural."[3]

Enlarging on the discussion he had presented in the Free Inquiry, Middleton notes that Justin is not alone in claiming the gift. Irenaeus and Origen also believed themselves to have been similarly blessed. But when their interpretations of Scripture are impartially examined, it

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1. Ibid., p. 244. 2. Brooke, op. cit., p. 276.

3. William Dodwell, A Free Answer to Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry Into the Miraculous Powers of the Primitive Church(London: 1749), p. 62.

will be discovered that they were the effects of "an unsound mind and a disordered reason."[1] The Fathers tried to graft their own doctrines and opinions onto the Scriptures and extract from them whatever they pleased.

This conclusion leads Middleton to another which he has made several times previously, that "the falsehood and imposture so manifestly discovered, and even confessed in the claim of this particular gift, must needs leave a strong suspicion, upon the authority of all the rest."[2]

Of all the extraordinary powers which he examines, Middleton makes the weakest case against this one. His examination and reply to his critics are below his usual quality. His defense of his position indulges in the kind of disputation which characterizes the feeble replies to his critical efforts. For example, he questions whether Dodwell's Free Answer is his own work of that of "the secretary onely [sic] of some little Synod, who jointly compiled it; for the plural expressions which he so frequently uses, It appears to us, &c., are the true synodical style, and cannot be applied to a single person."[3]

Brooke's criticism is in order, that the testimony which Middleton cites is not a clear claim to a charismatic gift. The weight of evidence balances toward those who maintain that after the days of the Apostles, the Primitive Churchmen made no such claim. Even granting that the Fathers felt that they had an extraordinary grace to interpret Scripture or divine mysteries, they did not indicate that this grace was in a category with a miraculous power to raise the dead or heal the sick.

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 191.

2. Ibid., p. 191. 3. Ibid., p. 188.

6. Tongues

Middleton examines as the last miraculous power which the Primitive Church had claimed, the gift of tongues. He notes that the advocates of Primitive miracles attach so much importance to the necessity of this gift continuing, that they hypothesize the continuance of the others on its reality. From the origin, nature, and use of it in the New Testament, however, as well as from the lack of evidence, he concludes that, like the others, it was not granted permanently to the Church, but vanished after the deaths of the Apostles.

Middleton wrote an essay on tongues which, though not dealing specifically with the continuance of the gift, elucidates his view of its nature and purpose. In this posthumous work, he says that the phenomenon displayed on the first Christian Pentecost was:

> . . . a faculty of speaking new and strange languages, infused instantaneously by God into the Apostles, in order to convince all those different nations, then residing in Jerusalem, that they were authorised and commissioned by a divine power, to preach the Gospel of Jesus.[1]

The gift served "on some solemn occasions, as a sensible proof and illustrious sign, that a divine influence rested on those, who were indued with it."[2] It was not of a permanent nature, "but adapted to peculiar occasions, and then withdrawn again, as soon as it had served that particular purpose, for which it was bestowed."[3] He notes that in the Corinthian letters Paul gives it an inferior rating among the spiritual gifts.

The Primitive testimony which figures most prominently in the discussion on this gift comes from Irenaeus. In one place he says,

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1. Ibid., p. 384. 2. Ibid., p. 385. 3. Ibid., p. 393.

"We also hear of many brethren in the Church having prophetical gifts, and speaking with all kinds of tongues by means of the Spirit."[1]

Yet, Middleton observes, Irenaeus himself appears to be in want of this gift. In the Preface of his work, Against Heresies, the Father comments:

> Thou wilt not expect from me, who am resident among the Keltae,[2] and am accustomed for the most part to use a barbarous dialect, any display of rhetoric, which I have never learned, or any excellence of composition, which I have never practised, or any beauty and persuasiveness of style, to which I make no pretensions. But thou wilt accept in a kindly spirit what I in a like spirit write to thee simply, truthfully, and in my homely way.[3]

Middleton interprets the phrase, "am accustomed for the most part to use a barbarous dialect"(περὶ βάρβαρον διάλεκτον τὸ πλεῖστον ἀσχολούμενον) to mean that Irenaeus had to spend the greatest part of his leisure learning the language of the natives. The authority for this interpretation is the historian, William Cave, who says in his remarks on the life of Irenaeus:

> Nor was it the least part of his trouble(as he himself plainly intimates) that he was forced to learn the language of the country, a rugged and(as he calls it) barbarous dialect, before he could do any good upon them. All which, and a great deal more, he cheerfully underwent, that he might be serviceable to the great interests of men.[4]

The fact that Irenaeus testified that this gift continued, while no one else laid claim to it or even so much as mentioned it, is

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1. Eusebius, op. cit., pp. 152 f.

2. n., "the natives of Celtic Gaul, Gaul being divided, as Caesar says, into three parts."

3. Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., V, 3.

4. William Cave, Lives of the Most Eminent Fathers of the Church That Flourished in the First Four Centuries(Oxford: J. Vincent, 1840), I, 269.

strange, Middleton points out. It does not seem credible either that a gift of such eminent value should entirely cease, while the rest were being exercised in full. If other miraculous powers had not been admitted, neither would a gift of tongues. The reason is obvious. While gifts like healing, exorcising, and prophesying allow room for imposture and could have been feigned, this particular one does not readily admit counterfeiting:

> . . . to acquire a number of languages by natural means, and to a degree that might make them pass for a supernatural gift, was a work of so much difficulty and labor, as rendered it impracticable to support a pretension of that kind, for a succession of many years.[1]

By this time it is apparent to the reader that Middleton assumed a gift of tongues and a gift of handling strange languages to have been synonymous, which was also the position of his contemporaries.

He concludes his examination with a historical survey. This gift was important in the earliest years of the Church. It was considered one of the principal gifts conferred on the first converts. A single post-Apostolic writer claimed it, and then it suddenly vanished. When miracles came to be suspected, it was no longer claimed, not even by Romanists. These considerations imply:

> . . . that the gift of tongues, may be considered as a proper test and criterion, for determining the miraculous pretensions of all Churches, which derive their descent from the Apostles; and consequently, if, in the list of their extraordinary gifts, they cannot shew [sic] us this, we may fairly conclude that they have none else to shew [sic], which are real and genuin [sic].[2]

Middleton implies more in this summary than the evidence allows. In addition to the fact that he misunderstands the nature of

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 248. 2. Ibid., p. 249.

the gift in the Apostolic Church and its use by the Apostles, he also exaggerates its importance in their ministry. He does not take into account Paul's cautioning the Corinthians about it.[1] Further, if the gift were impermanent--which is in accordance with Middleton's theory--it is difficult to see how it could serve as the test or criterion by which to measure the reality of other gifts.

His critics argued that the evidence for the Early Churchmen having the gift is positive. The argument was presented in a familiar pattern. The presumptive evidence is first paraded before the reader. Scriptures reveal a liberal distribution of the gift. Jesus foretold its continuation. The same reasons that made it necessary in the ministry of the Apostles made it necessary after their days. They had power to confer it liberally on laymen and other individuals who were Christians. One proof of this fact is that the Gentiles received the gift following the conversion of Cornelius.[2] Several persons in Corinth had it. Brooke presents the traditional plea:

> . . . the situation of the Christians, in the Ages immediately succeeding that of the Apostles, and the circumstances of those Times, give us reason to believe, that the exigencies of the Church were also then the very same; and therefore it may be fairly presumed, that this same Gift, as well as the other extraordinary powers of the Holy Ghost did still continue in it.[3]

Dodwell sets forth this reasoning on the purpose which the gift served:

> As soon as any Converts were gained amongst the Natives, They could speak to their Brethren in their own Tongue, and needed not supernatural Assistance in this Particular to gain Admission into Discourse with them, whatever They might do in other Instances to work Conviction upon them. As the Apostles therefore dispersed

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1. Cf. I Corinthians 14. 2. Cf. Acts 10:44-46.

3. Brooke, op. cit., p. 279.

> Themselves over the World, their first Success prevented any farther absolute Necessity for this Gift as a Means of Conversion, and furnished them with Partners in this Holy Work, who could join in talking to their own Countrymen. Before that Christianity was so far established, as to be able to make the rest of its Way, by its own Natural Strength, yet this Opening towards its future Success might be accomplished by the Conversion of some Few in each Place, who might in their Mother Tongue attempt the Conversion of the Rest; And therefore this Gift, if this was its chief Intent, might very probably cease, whilst other miraculous Endowments still subsisted in their full Vigour.[1]

Middleton's suggestion that the testimony is too scant to be evidence that the gift continued drew forth a familiar charge: that he did not believe the Bible. Since he will not accept a fact on the basis of a testimony or two from the writers in the Early Church, he can hardly believe that this power resided in the Corinthian Church, since Paul is alone in testifying to the fact.

It is difficult to see how Middleton's critics could have persisted in this insinuation when he had clearly admitted his belief in the reality of the phenomenon in the New Testament, and when there are such obvious differences between the evidence there and the testimony of the Early Church. In spite of the differences, Irenaeus's testimony was regarded by many theologians as being as good as Paul's. However, the latter deals with specific situations in which he has had experience with the gift, while Irenaeus records only what he has heard, and he mentions no particular person or place so gifted. Further, his experience with a strange language differs from what Paul seems to mean by a gift of tongues.

A discussion developed between Middleton and Dodwell over whether in the Early Church this particular gift continued to meet

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1. W. Dodwell, A Full and Final Reply, p. 265.

a need in an area where the language was foreign to the Apostles, or whether an indigenous leadership was quickly instituted to meet it. The discussion was based, as has already been inferred, on a misunderstanding of the nature of the gift, but it has some historical interest.

Dodwell says that since an indigenous leadership developed quickly, the gift became less useful early in the missionary situation. This accounts for the scarcity of testimony. Middleton insists that the history and the experience of the first and later missionaries suggest otherwise. Since the first converts were not well enough equipped to teach and preach, the gift continued to be needed, but was not available. Modern missionaries meet this need by learning the native language before going to a foreign land.

The following paragraph expresses what he thinks of his critics' line of reasoning:

> . . . we see, how readily they can dress up an hypothesis, and apply it presently as an allowed fact, to support the opinion which they are defending. They suppose, that when the first and gifted Preachers of the Gospel, had made a number of Converts in any barbarous country, they immediately left the whole care and administration of it, to those barbarous Converts, who, by preaching the word to their countrymen in their own native language, superseded all farther use of the gift of tongues. A mere imaginary scheme, without the least foundation in reason, history, or experience![1]

At this point Middleton approaches the kind of opinionated disputation which his writings drew from his critics.

His next move makes little improvement upon his defense. He attacks his opposition for exaggerating the need of one miraculous power above another. The gift of raising the dead was needed as much as the gift

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous works, II, 222.

of tongues. The conclusion is:

> On the whole, then, after all the real difficulties, which are found on the one side, and all the evasive shifts, which are offered on the other, what can we reasonably think or say of these two Miracles, which are supposed to have been withdrawn, as soon almost as they are clamed [sic], but what I have already intimated of one of them, that they never subsisted at all after the days of the Apostles, but having been rashly clamed [sic] by Irenaeus, or imposed upon him by others of more craft, yet found upon trial, too difficult to be maintained, were presently laid aside, and suffered to expire with their Author?[1]

Middleton's analysis of the slow development and ineffectiveness of the local ministry and non-indigenousness of the Early Church does not quite accord with historical fact. C. H. Turner observes that the transition from a general to a local ministry began to take place early in the life of the Church, though it was a gradual process and had intermediate steps:

> . . . the substitution of a local for a missionary supremacy over the Christian communities was necessary in the nature of things, and . . . as a matter of fact the development by which the earlier system sank into insignificance and the later rose into prominence was one which was not only practically complete by the year 150 A.D. but can be traced in germ nearly a hundred years before, was in full activity by the end of the first century, and was therefore, we may presume, sanctioned at least in principle by the Apostles themselves.[2]

Another lengthy discussion developed between Middleton and Dodwell over the meaning of Irenaeus's words with regard to his language difficulties in Gaul. Dodwell holds that the Father is not commenting on his method of acquiring or making use of the native language, but on how continued use of it had influenced his literary style:

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1. Ibid., pp. 235 f.
2. Turner, op. cit., p. 22.

> What He says is, that Elegance and Oratory were not to be expected from Him, because He was forced chiefly to use a language which did not admit of them; and such customary Use of a barbarous Dialect might probably debase his Style, which He did not take Pains to mend, having Nothing in view but Truth and Perspicuity.[1]

Of more concern to Dodwell, however, than the interpretation of Irenaeus's testimony is his character. As a witness, he stands unassailable, and, therefore, his positive testimony elsewhere[2] proves that the gift of tongues continued.

Middleton defends his interpretation of what Irenaeus had meant. He is convinced that the Father was maintaining that he had had a struggle in mastering the language of Celtic Gaul, an indication that a supernatural gift of tongues had not been available to him.

Dodwell comes back after a commentary and lexicon study and claims that Irenaeus is not saying that he was constantly occupied with learning the local language, but is talking about his use of it. The passage does not prove, therefore, that he had lacked the gift on first going to Gaul.

Further, Dodwell says that his father had proved that at the time of writing Against Heresies Irenaeus was an old man. Presumably he would have known the language of the district in which he was working. Again, Irenaeus might have learned the language before he went to Gaul, but had learned it hastily and had concentrated on conversing in it, rather than writing it. Or again, he could have been apologizing for the fact that he had worked so long with a foreign language that his Greek had suffered.

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1. W. Dodwell, A Full and Final Reply, p. 259.

2. Cf. p. 163 of this chapter.

The disputation over Irenaeus's words is senseless. The simplest meaning of his words seems to be, not so much that his preoccupation with a foreign language had affected his use of his own, but that he had never disciplined himself to be a polished writer.

One attenuation of Dodwell's conclusions attaches to his dependence upon his father as an authority. The latter had placed Irenaeus's birthdate at about 97 A.D., whereas most scholars put it at about 130.

Another reason that the discussion over what Irenaeus means is of little value in determining whether the Apostolic gift of tongues continued relates to a matter already mentioned, the interpretation by Middleton and his critics of what the gift was. The traditional view, to which both he and they subscribed, made no distinction between the phenomenon on Pentecost[1] and the other references to it in Scripture.[2] To the eighteenth-century English theologians, these references all meant one thing: a sudden and miraculous ability to handle a foreign language, without previous study and without previous, or with only the most superficial, contact with it.

Recent scholarship is not in agreement. The position most acceptable to modern Biblical critics is that Luke and Paul seem to be speaking of different experiences when they refer to this gift, and that Paul does not mean by it a miraculous ability to communicate in a foreign language. F. J. Foakes-Jackson comments:

> Luke . . . cannot possibly mean that the sign of Pencost, whereby everybody was edified by hearing the praises of

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1. Cf. Acts 2:4-7.

2. Mark 16:17; Acts 10:46; 19:6; I Corinthians 12:28; 14:27 f.

> God in his own language, was identical with the glossolalia or 'speaking with tongues,' the abuse of which was regulated by Paul in his Corinthian letter. Indeed, if the Author of the Acts were a companion of the Apostle, he must have known that the common phenomenon of 'speaking with tongues' did not in any way resemble what is recorded to have taken place in Acts ii.[1]

Foakes-Jackson surmises that the language used on Pentecost was Aramaic, and that the majority of those present could have understood the speech of the Galileans, "since Aramaic in some form or other was generally understood by the inhabitants of the countries in which it was generally a lingua franca as the language of commerce."[2]

Along with Foakes-Jackson, G. H. C. MacGregor distinguishes between the interpretation of the gift of tongues which the second chapter of Acts suggests and the phenomenon of which Paul speaks. Commenting in the Interpreter's Bible on the references in Acts, he denies that the gift of tongues on Pentecost was a unique handling of a foreign language or languages, and that the Pentecostal experience was different from the glossolalia mentioned elsewhere in Scripture:

> The "speaking with tongues" at Pentecost was almost certainly the same common phenomenon [as in the Corinthian letter], and not something unique as suggested by Luke, who undoubtedly intends us to understand that the disciples were miraculously endowed with the power to speak foreign languages. But this idea is quite inconsistent with the evidence elsewhere, even of Acts itself. There is, of course, no hint elsewhere that the apostles ever made use of such a gift in their missionary labors; nor would it have been necessary in a world where Greek Koine was almost universally understood.[3]

F. F. Bruce's position is that the Pentecostal phenomenon and

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1. F. J. Foakes-Jackson, The Acts of the Apostles, The Moffat New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1931), pp. 11 f.

2. Ibid., p. 12.

3. G. H. C. MacGregor, Introduction and Exegesis to "The Acts of the Apostles," Vol. IX of The Interpreter's Bible, ed. by George Arthur Buttrick, et. al. (12 vols.; Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), p. 37.

the Pauline glossolalia were not the same, and in neither case is an acquaintance with a strange language involved. His comment on Acts 2:4 is:

> The context here implies that the disciples' words made good sense to those who understood the various languages or dialects, but were unintelligible to others. Their hearers probably all spoke either Gk. or Aram. as their native tongue. The disciples, suddenly delivered from the peculiarities of their Galilean speech, praised God and rehearsed His mighty works in such a way that each hearer recognized with surprise his own native language or dialect. . . . The Corinthian glossolalia does not seem to have been quite the same as this, to judge from Paul's deprecating description of it (I Cor. xiv.: 23). The effect of the Pentecostal glossolalia was better understanding on the part of the hearers; this does not appear to have been so at Corinth, nor is it so in many Churches where the gift of tongues is cultivated nowadays.[1]

Whatever languages were heard on the day of Pentecost, and whatever the manner in which the glossolalia was expressed in the New Testament Church, the evidence points to this conclusion: the gift of tongues should not be interpreted to mean a miraculous power to communicate in a foreign or strange language. Scripture does not indicate that the Apostles understood the gift thus or used it in this sense as an effective missionary tool. Its use in this manner by the Early Church, therefore, is unlikely. Glossolalia probably was a phenomenon in the Early Church after the days of the Apostles, as it is in branches of the Church today. But it should be considered less the effect of a miraculous power and the persons speaking thus no longer divinely appointed, as Paul indicates they at one time were,[2] and it should be regarded more as the fruit of an emotional, or for that matter, a "spiritual," indulgence.

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1. F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles (London: The Tyndale Press, 1951), p. 82.

2. Cf. I Corinthians 12:28.

Because Biblical scholarship by the middle of the eighteenth century had not yet provided a more accurate understanding of the gift of tongues, the controversy over whether it had continued proceeded on top of a foundation which was made of sand rather than rock. Middleton's conclusions, nevertheless, survived the floods of controversy, while the presumptions of his critics, and the conclusions which they based on so-called positive evidences, proved unequal to the flood of objections against them. Historical evidence makes a more decisive case against a continuing gift of tongues than for it.

Middleton had the advantage in the discussion of the miracles claimed after the days of the Apostles. The evidence for many of them is scarce, and for most of them it is suspicious and feeble. The testimony is inadequate. The effort to credit it because of the characters of the witnesses fails, and the failure is not so much because of the bad characters of the Fathers--which Middleton tends to overemphasize--as because much of the testimony itself is absurd. Nor do the presumptive arguments on the need and value of continuing miracles make an effective substitute for evidence.

The best way to dispose of the claims which are found in the writings of the Church Fathers previous to, and early in, the fourth century is to classify them as Middleton did, as fictions rather than facts.

CHAPTER VI

FACTS AND FICTIONS: MIRACLES OF AND AFTER THE FOURTH CENTURY

1. Polycarp's Martyrdom and Certain Other Wonders Previous to the Fourth Century
2. Chrysostom's and Augustine's Wonders
3. Other Extraordinary Happenings of the Fourth Century
4. Miracles After the Fourth Century

The discussion on the miracles of the fourth century and afterwards was less controversial than that on the ones previous to that date. Most English theologians contemporary with Middleton agreed that the later ones were more fictional than the earlier ones.

This concurrence of judgment resulted partly from like theories on the need of miraculous powers. Although Middleton and his critics disagreed on how early the need had ceased, they concurred in the view that after the edict of Constantine in 313, miracles no longer served the purpose they had when the Church was beginning. After this time the accounts became too numerous and incredible. The following paragraph written by the Church Historian, Jortin, shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century sums up the views of most English theologians:

> Now if we consider the miracles related by writers of the fourth and fifth centuries, we find . . . that they are perpetually relating things which they saw not, which they learned from hearsay; and in these relations they agree not one with another.
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> Miracles were so profusely exhibited, and so ostentatiously vaunted by persons whom it was not safe to contradict, that it might easily be perceived to be a kind of game, tending to establish the authority of the winners, and to take advantage of the credulity of the populace; and it is hard to

conceive that men of sense in those days could pay any regard to them.[1]

Middleton was more thoroughly, resolutely, and uncompromisingly convinced of Jortin's opinion of the later miracles than any other English theologian in the eighteenth century. Observing in the fourth section of the Free Inquiry that the testimony in the fourth century and afterwards is abundant and emphatic, he examined the claims in order to support his contention that they are fantastic and ridiculous.

Before he explored this testimony, however, he paused to consider certain incidents which had not fit in with his examination of the six miraculous gifts claimed by the Primitive Churchmen.

1. Polycarp's Martyrdom and Certain Other Wonders Previous to the Fourth Century.

One extraordinary event of the Early Church which he examines is the martyrdom of Polycarp. It is narrated in an account addressed by the Church of Smyrna to the Church of Philomelium, and apparently written shortly after the event, in the year 155 or 156. Lightfoot's summary of the incident follows:

> Meanwhile Polycarp had been persuaded to retire to a farm not far from the city. There he saw in a vision his pillow in flames, and prophesied that he should die by fire (#5). At length he was detected, being betrayed by a lad of his household; and Herod, the captain of police, sent a mounted force to apprehend him (#6). . . . Then seated on an ass, he was led to the city, where he was met by Herod and Herod's father Nicetes, who transferred him to their own carriage. They entreated him to sacrifice, but he staunchly refused . . . . Polycarp joyfully declared himself a Christian. The people cried out against him, and asked the Asiarch Philip to let a lion loose upon him. This he refused to do, as the venationes were over. Then they cried out for fire. This was so ordained, that his vision of the burning pillow might be fulfilled (#12). Accordingly a huge pyre of logs and

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1. Jortin, op. cit., pp. 88 f.

> faggots was heaped up, the Jews being the most active at this work. He took off his clothes and his sandals. On their attempting to nail him to the stake, he asked to be left free(#13). They were satisfied with binding him, and there he stood like a ram ready for the sacrifice. Then he poured forth prayer and thanksgiving, glorifying God that He had accepted him as a sacrificial victim(#14). The fire was lighted; but the flame refused to touch him, arching itself into a vault around him; while a sweet odour rose, as of incense(#15). At length, as the fire refused to do its work, an executioner was ordered to stab him. From the wound issued [a dove and] a quantity of blood, so as to quench the flames to the marvel of all. Thus died the saint, whose every prophecy was fulfilled(#16).[1]

In addition to this summary from the Greek manuscript, one paragraph from Eusebius's extracts of the account is important:

> Now though there was such a tumult therein that many could not even so much as hear, a voice out of heaven came to Polycarp as he entered it [the pyre] , "Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man." And though no one saw the speaker, many of our people heard the voice.[2]

Middleton's aim in examining the martyrdom testimony is to account for the extraordinary incidents. He insists that they can be explained as natural phenomena or as errors which have crept into the tradition.

His first observation deals with the drowning of the fire and the disposing of Polycarp's remains. To him the extinguishing of the fire by the Saint's blood implies nothing miraculous: "It appears from the sequel of the narrative that there was enough fire still left, to consume the body to ashes, which was executed with great care, that the Christians might not be able to preserve the least remains of it."[3]

Middleton is justified in ruling out anything miraculous

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1. J. B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers(2d ed.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), III, 354. (The brackets are the editor's.)

2. Eusebius, op. cit., p. 119.

3. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 252.

in the putting out of the fire, but the following account from Eusebius contradicts his suggestion about Polycarp's remains:

> When, therefore, the centurion saw the contention caused by the Jews, he set him in the midst, as their custom is, and burnt him. And so we on our part afterwards took up his bones, more valuable than precious stones and purer than wrought gold, and laid them in a fitting place.[1]

Middleton's critics do not wish to defend the extraordinariness of this incident too strongly. Dodwell cautiously questions Middleton, quibbling over how nearly the fire was out, and he attempts to explain why the aged Polycarp could have had enough blood in his body to drown it. He also argues that Providence wisely distributed the available blood so as to put out the flame.[2]

Middleton's other observations are more provocative and deserve more attention than the first one. The second incident he discusses in detail is the dove which supposedly flew from the fatal wound executed on Polycarp's body. He objects to the incident, first because Eusebius does not mention it. Noticing that Archbishop Usher includes it, he points out that this edition of the martyrdom is based on the old Latin versions, which mention the dove. Middleton prefers the position of the senior Henry Dodwell,[3] who relies on the edition by Eusebius. He agrees with him, that Eusebius's omission renders the narrative less suspicious.

In an argument which contains both truth and conjecture, he attempts to explain why Eusebius's silence is strong evidence against the dove. The Historian is abridging the martyrdom, and he leaves out

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1. Eusebius, op. cit., p. 121.
2. W. Dodwell, A Full and Final Reply, cf. p. 126.
3. H. Dodwell, Dissertationes In Irenaeum, cf. p. 147.

whatever is insignificant, unnecessary, suspicious, or improper.

The rest of Middleton's case is based on an assumption that later scholarship has questioned, namely, that Eusebius took the opportunity to correct the reference to the dove in the available manuscripts, "because every body would see it to be a most flagrant and shameful fiction."[1]

This conclusion leads Middleton to suggest that the silence of later writers indicates that they reasoned like Eusebius, welcoming the opportunity to get rid of so ridiculous a fiction as the dove. In addition, later writers had Eusebius as a reliable authority for the omission.

Middleton agrees with a theory suggested by Archbishop Wake, that the detail is an interpolation which had harmful effects. The Archbishop believed that the narrative of Polycarp's martyrdom had suggested a dove-myth to certain other writers. For example, Prudentius, who lived during the second half of the fourth century, in a hymn celebrating the martyrdom of a virgin, Eulalia, has a dove fly out of her mouth as she dies. Again, an account by Lucian(b. 120?) of the death of Peregrinus relates that when he threw himself into the flames at an Olympic Game, a vulture ascended from the funeral pyre.

Middleton believes he knows what motivated Lucian to relate this item: he was taking advantage of the opportunity which the account of Polycarp's martyrdom afforded the apostates of Christianity "to deride the doctrines, the rites, the credulity and superstition of its professors."[2]

Middleton is not entirely convincing at this point. His

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 174. 2. Ibid., p. 172.

suggestion might or might not have been the case. The authors mentioned could have introduced the bird as a literary embellishment and without any intention of mockery, or any deliberate imitation.

Middleton comments on the dove in another section of the Free Inquiry, where he argues that the rejection of certain details in a historical account does not destroy a belief in the factual incidents related. For example, the rejection of the dove-fiction does not jeopardize a belief in the historical facts connected with Polycarp's martyrdom. Neither does a natural explanation of the dove's presence hurt the account. He offers the following suggestion:

> . . . if a Dove was really seen to fly out of the wood, which was prepared to consume him, it might have been conveyed thither, probably by design, in order to be let loose at a certain moment: as in the funerals of the Roman Emperors, an Eagle was always observed to fly out of the funeral pyre, as soon as it began to blaze, which was supposed to convey the soul of the deceased to heaven; of which a solemn deposition was constantly made upon oath, in order to the Deification of those Emperors.[1]

However, Middleton is convinced that Wake's theory of an interpolation is the most reasonable explanation of the phenomenon.

Middleton's critics recognized the value of his historical investigation and did not attempt to refute him. They agreed that the accounts which include the dove are not the genuine text.

Later scholarship supports this view. Lightfoot holds it, but he believes that, though possible, it is highly doubtful that the omission of the reference to the dove is an arbitrary alteration by Eusebius. He notes that the words are missing in all extant Greek manuscripts, in Rufinus's Latin translation of Eusebius, in the Syriac version of the martyrdom, and in writers like Nicephorus, who borrowed

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1. Ibid., I, 354.

from Eusebius. On the other hand, they are found in the Acts of Martyrdom, the progenitor of all existing manuscripts. Lightfoot summarizes the evidence. The arguments in favor of the omission are:

> 1. The internal evidence, that the dove seems out of place. Whereas the narrative relates that the blood does its work--it extinguishes the fire--the account offers no explanation of what the dove symbolizes. Unlike the other references to a dove, such as in Scripture and in classical literature, the dove does not fly upward from the body, symbolizing the soul going to heaven.
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> 2. The external evidence, that Eusebius is probably an older authority than the extant form of the Acts of Martyrdom; that he in this place seems to be giving the words verbatim; that the dove would not have been offensive to him, since in a later place in his Ecclesiastical History (Vi. 29) he relates that a dove's descent on Fabian's head convinced the people that he was to succeed Anteros as bishop of Rome.

The argument in favor of retaining the dove is:

> . . . that the text of the Acts is generally a safer guide than Eusebius, who does not profess to give the document word for word, who omits clauses and expressions here and there, and whose taste might have been offended by this bald materialism, just as he omits the image of the ἄρτος ὀπεκόμενος in section 15.[1]

There is good reason to believe that the arguments against the dove predominate, or at least that there is nothing miraculous about its emergence from the pyre.

Middleton doubts not only the details concerning the putting out of the fire and the flight of the dove, but he suspects the other miracles purported to have happened during Polycarp's martyrdom. He contends that the voice supposedly heard from heaven "was heard onely [sic] by a few, and that in a time of such hurry, in which nothing could be heard distinctly."[2] Those who claimed to have heard the

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1. Lightfoot, op. cit., cf. p. 392.

2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 353.

voice were in the middle of a shouting crowd, and their zeal and imagination could have been "so particularly affected by so moving an occasion, [that they] might easily mistake it for miraculous."[1]

Middleton's critics were not as agreeable to his views on the voice as they were on the dove. They believe it just as probable that the voice came from heaven as that it did not, and that if it did, it cannot be otherwise than that it was so distinct that those who heard it would have been affected by it and believed it.

Dodwell insists that the evidence is positive. The phenomenon is credible. The occasion was worthy of a Divine interposition, nothing is new or unsuitable to the former methods of Providence, and other strong presumptions favor the voice:

> The Cause, the Method, the Reason of the Thing, confirm the Credibility of the Fact, and the Nature of the Thing, which the numerous Spectators could not at All be mistaken in, secures the Credibility of the Witnesses, and obviates the Imputation of their being deceived in this Article.[2]

Dodwell wonders by what authority Middleton says that only a few heard the voice. Many Christians were no doubt present. Further, Eusebius says that many heard it, and other manuscripts say the same. When Middleton argues that there was so much noise that few voices were distinct, and, therefore, the voice could have been imagined, Dodwell replies that the noise is the very circumstance which makes the voice all the more credible;

> . . . it could not possibly in that Noise and Tumult have come from a private Person. The particular Mention of this Noise seems to have been inserted, more to obviate such an Insinuation, than for any other Purpose which can well be assigned.[3]

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1. Ibid., p. 354.

2. W. Dodwell, A Full and Final Reply, p. 120. 3. Ibid.,p.121.

Middleton's suggestions are more acceptable than Dodwell's. The latter has no more than a presumption for arguing dogmatically on how distinct the voice was or how many heard it. Eusebius's reference does not make the detail any more believable. In support of the position Middleton takes, Lightfoot points out[1] that the reference to the voice was no doubt suggested by John 12:28 f: "Then a voice came from heaven. . . . The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.'"

Since adequate and impartial testimony is lacking, it is not unreasonable to conclude with Middleton that the supposed voice from heaven in connection with Polycarp's martyrdom is fiction.

The Free Inquiry deals with one other phenomenon related to this incident. A natural explanation is offered for the curious shape taken by the flames. The arch-like appearance "might easily happen from the common effects of the wind, or something at least so like it, as to afford matter enough to a superstitious fancy, to supply the rest."[2]

The critics of the Free Inquiry considered this explaining away of a miracle as absurd as the others. That this phenomenon should happen naturally must appear, Brooke says, "to every man of sense utterly incredible."[3] How, he asks, can Middleton account for the fire being divested of burning qualities and leaving Polycarp's body undamaged? He passes this judgment on Middleton's natural explanations: "subtle refinements, forced constructions, and evasive distinctions."[4]

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1. Lightfoot, op. cit., cf. p. 377, n. 11.
2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 354.
3. Brooke, op. cit., p. 95. 4. Ibid., pp. 95 f.

Dodwell can conceive of no other reason for the stabbing of Polycarp than that the flames were supernaturally arched, and, therefore, ineffective. Further, "The Method of his Preservation, by the Formation of an Arch over his Head, was the most probable one that can well be thought of."[1]

The discussion on the arch affords another example of Middleton's critics avoiding a scientific analysis of a historical incident. They strain in order to justify the arch as something extraordinary, whereas it makes no strain on the objective imagination to believe in the wind arching the flames. The arguments in support of the arch do not totter Middleton's objections and explanations.

Before his examination of Polycarp's martyrdom is dismissed, it should be noticed that his critics objected to the place in the Free Inquiry where Middleton examines it. Dodwell insisted that the insertion of it so late was an "undue Piece of Art and Management."[2] He accused Middleton of trying to obscure the testimony of the immediate post-Apostolic witnesses on continuing miraculous powers.

Besides the foregoing apologies, other traditional arguments were offered in defense of the extraordinary phenomena connected with the martyrdom. Brooke insisted that the account is attested by reliable historical testimony, and the miracles are not improbable: "The occasion was important; the end, for which they might be performed, not unworthy the Wisdom of God."[3]

Dodwell insisted upon the good effects of the miracles; they "awakened the Attention of Friends and Enemies and prepared the one for Con-

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1. W. Dodwell, A Full and Final Reply, p. 123.
2. Ibid., p. 117. 3. Brooke, op. cit., p. 90.

viction, and the other for Perseverence."[1] Above all, the evidence is positive. The letter from the Smyrnan Church is genuine. This is answer enough to anybody who questions the extraordinary phenomena. It is inconsistent to accept the historical facts and reject the miracles, since both are reliably attested as matters-of-fact.

The theologians who criticized Middleton's observations on Polycarp's demise were unwilling to accept his principle that the genuineness of a letter, no matter how sacred, does not guarantee that all the matters related therein are matters-of-fact or truth. Nor were they willing to believe that rejecting the incredible details in a narrative does not necessitate rejecting what is historically factual in it. Because they feared the consequences of explaining the extraordinary phenomena scientifically, and because they were satisfied with a criterion for evidence that is of little value to a scientific inquirer, they were a stumbling block to a more valuable appraisal of the records of the Early Church.

Middleton was the champion in this discussion; he admitted that the account of the martyrdom had been flavored with fiction.

Turning from this incident, he comments briefly on some other miracles related by Eusebius. One of them is an incident connected with Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem at the close of the second and the beginning of the third century. On one occasion, during the vigil of Easter, the sacred oil was almost used up. Since the people were in great consternation over the dwindling supply, Narcissus ordered those who had charge of the lamps to go to a certain well and fill them with water. The lamp-tenders obeyed, while he prayed. The water

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1. W. Dodwell, A Free Answer, p. 38.

miraculously changed into oil, and Eusebius relates that some of it was on display in his day. Also, he tells how certain pillars in Jerusalem had shed tears during the barbarian persecutions of the Christians in Palestine.

Accounts such as these could be excused in an orator or a poet, Middleton says, but they are inexcusable in a Church Historian. One who records such wonders "debases the gravity of History, and makes miracles themselves contemptible."[1]

Middleton overemphasizes the detrimental effect which the fictions in Eusebius's writings have on the historical contribution which he makes. Besides, he fluctuates in his opinion of Eusebius's judgment. Although he criticizes him adversely in his earlier works, he observes in his Vindication, when he is arguing against the dove in Polycarp's martyrdom, that Eusebius, "according to his own discretion and judgment, always omits whatever he thinks insignificant, or unnecessary, or of suspicious credit, or improper to be offered to public view."[2]

In spite of the exaggerations and slight contradictions, Middleton's remarks served the purpose of challenging the Church to scrutinize its earliest records critically, to examine the wonders related empirically, to discriminate between what is fiction and what is fact, and not to hesitate to explain many of the accounts as a combination of the two.

2. Chrysostom's and Augustine's Wonders

Introducing his explorations into the miracles of the fourth

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 256.
2. Ibid., II, 173

century, Middleton says that he had originally planned to confine his investigations to earlier Church History, but several factors had altered his plan. For one thing, Eusebius's testimonies provoked him. Then, the first Henry Dodwell's suspicions of the miracles recorded by Gregory of Nyssa in his life of Gregory Thaumaturgos attracted him. But more important than anything else is this fact:

> . . . having since perceived, that several of our learned Divines, and principal advocates of the Christian Faith, have not scrupled to assert the succession of true miracles, to the end even of the fifth century, I thought it necessary to extend my argument to the same length, lest I should seem to neglect any evidence which could be offered to me, and especially such, as is declared to be convincing and decisive by men of their character.[1]

His first comment on the testimony on the miracles in the fourth century relates to its inconsistency, and then he judges the motives of those who give it. He believes that the Fathers' design is suspect: "Tho' they were ashamed to deny, what they knew to be true, yet they were desirous to inculcate, what they knew to be false."[2]

To substantiate his charge of inconsistency, he examines the testimonies of Chrysostom and Augustine. He quotes several passages which seem to show that the former is convinced that miracles had ceased by his time(345?-407). One of these, from On the Priesthood, argues that preaching is important because it must accomplish what miracles had effected in the first years of the Church:

> Howbeit we should not seek this [the preaching of the Word] so eagerly if we had the power of working miracles. But if there is not so much as a trace of that power left, while many enemies are continually assailing us on every side, it remains for us to support ourselves by this defence that we

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1. Ibid., I, 256 f. 2. Ibid., p. 257.

> are not overwhelmed by the shafts of the enemy, but that we may overthrow them.[1]

Chrysostom suggests that miracles were not happening in his day because of a lack of faith, virtue, and piety.

At the same time, he relates that they were being performed by means of the relics of the martyrs, that devils were being exorcised, and that diseases were being healed miraculously. He also relates that consecrated oil was emanating a miraculous power, and that the sign of the cross was accomplishing wonders.

The inconsistency and absurdity in Chrysostom convince Middleton that he contributes nothing reliable for arguing that miracles had continued.

Augustine(354-430) then comes under Middleton's examination. A passage in which the Saint replies to the sceptics' taunts that the Christians are working no miracles is quoted:

> But how comes it, say they [the sceptics] , that you have no such Miracles nowadays, as you say were done of yore? I might answer, that they were necessary, before the world believed, to induce it to believe: and he that seeks to be confirmed by wonders now, is to be wondered at most of all himself; in refusing to believe what all the world believes besides him.[2]

As Middleton interprets this passage, Augustine is maintaining that miracles had ceased. But a few sentences later he says:

> . . . and for miracles, there are some wrought as yet, partly by the sacraments, partly by the commemorations and prayers of the saints, but they are not so famous, nor so glorious as the other; for the Scriptures which were to be divulged in all places, have given lustre to the first,

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1. St. John Chrysostom, On the Priesthood, Edited by T. Allen Moxon(London: Richard Clay & Sons, Limited, 1907), pp. 113 f.

2. Augustine, The City of God(De Civitate Dei), translated into English by John Healey(First published in 1610; Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909), II, 336.

> in the knowledge of all nations, whereas the latter are only known unto the cities where they are done, or some parts about them. And generally, there are few that know them there, and many that do not, if the city be great; and when they relate them to others, they are not believed so fully, and so absolutely as the other, although they be declared by one Christian to another.[1]

Augustine records several extraordinary events. He narrates a miracle which had happened while he was still in Milan. The Bishop, Ambrose, had had a vision which told him where the bodies of the two martyrs, Protasius and Gervase, had been buried.

Augustine tells of a resident of Carthage, Innocentius, who had been miraculously relieved of a rectal fistula. On the night before a scheduled operation, the Bishop of Uzali and Bishop Aurelius and certain other prominent churchmen of Carthage held a prayer service. Innocentius passionately and violently joined in the prayers. The next morning when everything was prepared for surgery, the physician discovered that an operation was not necessary; the fistula had disappeared.

In the same town a certain woman, Innocentia, who had a breast cancer which doctors had told her was incurable, sought the help of the Lord. She learned in a vision that on the next Easter she was to wait on the women's side of the baptismal font, and she was to ask the first woman baptized to make the sign of the cross on the afflicted part of her body. She obeyed the instructions, and her cancer was cured.

Several cures also happened at a place called Andurus, which was blessed with a portion of the body of Stephen. Among the most

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1. Ibid., p. 337.

amazing of these miracles are the following:

> A child being in the street, certain oxen that drew a cart, growing unruly, left the way and ran over the child with a wheel, so that it lay all crushed and past all hope of life. The mother snatched it up and ran to the shrine with it, where laying it down, it recovered both life and full strength again in an instant, being absolutely cured of all hurt whatsoever. Near this place, at Caspalia, dwelt a votaress, who being sick and past recovery, sent her garment to the shrine, but ere it came back she was dead, yet her parents covered her with it, which done, she presently revived and was as sound as ever.[1]

Augustine relates other strange things. Evil spirits had once roamed the farm of a man named Hesperius, attacking his servants and his cattle. He requested a priest to come and expel the evil spirits by prayer. A priest went and prayed and administered the Communion, and "by God's mercy the devil was quit from the place ever after."[2] Some relics of Stephen were the means of several miracles in Hippo. The blind received their sight, fistulas were cured, and unbelievers turned believers before the relics.

In fact, Augustine says that the profusion of extraordinary happenings of which he was aware presented him with a problem. He had promised to be brief in his mentioning of them, but he finds it difficult: "For if I should but relate all the miracles done by the memorials of St. Stephen only at Calama and Hippo, it would be a work of many volumes, and yet not be perfect either."[3] He goes on to remark, "We see our times produce wonders like to those of yore."[4]

Concerned with the popular negligence of miracles, he started action to preserve them in the memory of the Christians. The passage in which he gives the reason for his action testifies again to the

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1. Ibid., p. 342. 2. Ibid., p. 340. 3. Ibid., p. 343.
4. Ibid., p. 343.

fact that miracles were numerous:

> So that we see that there are miracles at this day wrought by God, with what means He likes best who wrought them of yore: but they are not so famous, nor fastened in the memory by often reading, that they might not be forgotten. For although we have gotten a good custom of late of reading the relations of such as these miracles are wrought upon unto the people, yet perhaps they are read but once, which they that are present do hear, but no one else: nor do they that hear them keep them long in remembrance, nor will any of them take the pains to relate them to those that have not heard them.[1]

Middleton insists that the implications of this passage are as good a condemnation of the post-Apostolic miracles as any available. Augustine's labors indicate "that coldness and indifference, which the people of those days expressed towards them."[2] The people recognized the absurdities for what they were.

Noting that John Chapman and William Berriman consider Augustine's testimony so explicit and reliable that to deny it is to deny the validity of sensory experience, Middleton says that he is willing to determine the case for continuing miracles on the basis of these accounts. They come from one of the most venerable Fathers of antiquity, and they are representative of the miracles claimed before and after his time.

He is confident that the wonders are incredible. He lists several objections: the incompetency of the instruments by which they were performed; the ends for which they were performed; Augustine's struggles to keep them in the minds of the people; and the "credulity of a prejudiced, or the fidelity, rather, of an artful and interested relator."[3] He sees no other conclusion than that among Augustine's

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1. Ibid., p. 344.

2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I,267. 3. Ibid., p. 274.

contemporaries there was "a general persuasion, grounded on experience, that these pretended miracles were nothing but forgeries, contrived to enforce some favorite doctrine or rite, which the rulers of the Church were desirous to establish."[1]

Overshadowing Middleton's specific criticisms of Chrysostom and Augustine are his observations on the miracles of the fourth century in his Introductory Discourse. It will be recalled that in his earlier work he had charged that the wonders of this period cannot be accepted because it was at this time that the chief corruptions of Popery were introduced. He had argued that, because of the miracles claimed by the Roman Church and the doctrines established thereby, the admission by Protestants that the miracles of the fourth century are real "would call us back again to the old superstition of our ancestors; would fill us with Monks, and Reliques, and Masses, and all the other trinkets, which the treasury of Rome can supply."[2]

These conclusions were not as objectionable to Middleton's critics as his views on the earlier miracles. As already noted, few Protestant divines regarded the later ones favorably. They theorized that the Church did not need miracles any longer, and Brooke, at least, was willing to admit that the later testimony is faulty:

> Some of the most eminent and distinguished among these later Fathers [Athanasius, Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, et. al.] have, by contrary testimonies, not only destroyed their Own authority, but also that of all their Contemporaries. There is such a want of harmony and unanimity; so much plain inconsistency and contradiction among themselves, with regard to the point in Question; as to render the several relations of them All justly suspected, and to make a wide difference between the credibility

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1. Ibid., p. 275. 2. Ibid., p. lxi.

> of their Testimony, and that of the Earlier Fathers, in whose evidence, no such disagreement and contrariety is to be discovered.[1]

What convinces Brooke that miracles had ceased by the middle of the fourth century is the testimony of Chrysostom and Augustine. He admits that these two contradicted themselves and that the occasions and instruments of their performaces reveal them to have been the effects of fraud and forgery. The miracles were not as illustrious and credible as those performed by the Apostles and Christians in the earlier years of Christianity. He says of Augustine's wonders:

> They were not performed in so public a manner; being known to a very few only; and those very few paying little or no regard to the recital of them; for they were not received without difficulty and doubting, even tho' reported by true believers to true believers.[2]

Dodwell continues to betray his unwillingness to face facts. He defends Chrysostom and Augustine, arguing that they were not inconsistent, and that Middleton abuses their testimony, supporting his arguments with stories which tend more to amuse and prejudice the reader than corroborate a point. His explanation of the inconsistency is that the two Fathers mentioned were merely distinguishing between the earlier standing miraculous powers and the later miracles.[3]

He has a better opinion than Middleton or Brooke of the purpose which Chrysostom and Augustine saw in the miracles to which they testified:

> They thought the Establishment of Christianity prevented the Necessity of their Continuance as a Means of converting Heathens, but they thought that they were still wrought amongst

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 367. 2. Ibid., p. 383.

3. W. Dodwell, A Free Answer, cf. p. 93.

> the Believers for their Edification or Support. Suppose that They were mistaken or imposed upon in the latter, This however frees them from any Self-Contradiction, which was the Accusation here brought against them.[1]

Neither Dodwell's criticism of Middleton's handling of their testimonies, nor his standard argument that the miracles of Augustine and Chrysostom served a useful purpose, obscures the fictional and contradictory elements in their attestations. He has a point, however, in noticing that Augustine distinguishes between the Apostolic and later miracles. But he gives more credence to the Saint's testimony because he makes the distinction than it, in fact, allows. All that Augustine emphasizes is the difference in the performance and publication. The pointing out of this distinction does not thereby satisfactorily explain the inconsistency in the testimony. B. B. Warfield suggests why:

> The common solution of this inconsistent attitude toward miracles, that the ecclesaistical miracles were only recognized [by the Fathers] as differing in kind from those of the Scriptures, while going a certain way, will hardly suffice for the purpose. . . . No doubt, we must recognize that these Fathers realized that the ecclesiastical miracles were of a lower order than those of Scripture. It looks very much as if, when they were not inflamed by enthusiasm, they did not really think them to be miracles at all.[2]

The discussion thus far on the miracles of the fourth century can be summed up as follows:

> 1. Chrysostom and Augustine, who are the primary sources of the testimony, indicate that the miracles which are the fruits of the Apostolic charismatic gifts, and which the earlier Fathers claim to have performed, had for the most part disappeared by the beginning of the fourth century.
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> 2. They nevertheless both relate miracles, without clearly distinguishing between the standing miraculous powers

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1. W. Dodwell, A Full and Final Reply, p. 265.

2. Warfield, op. cit., p. 48.

which they say have ceased and those which they claim are continuing in their times.

3. Suspicious and fictitious details abound in the miracles to which they testify.

4. Middleton insists that the Saints contradict themselves, and therefore their testimony is unreliable. The testimonies are also unbelievable because of their fictional extravagance.

5. Middleton's critics both agree and disagree with him, and disagree among themselves on these testimonies. Not anxious to press the charges of self-contradiction too far or to let it get any farther back into the history of miracles, Brooke is convinced that the miracles related by these two Fathers are incredible because of the reasons for which, as well as the circumstances under which, they were performed. Dodwell's argument that the Fathers distinguish between earlier and later miraculous powers does not resolve the apparent contradiction in the testimony, and his attempts to credit the miracles are equally unsatisfactory.

6. Middleton exaggerates the implications of self-contradiction, but he nevertheless exposes the fact that although Chrysostom and Augustine make a valuable contribution to homiletics and theology, they show a lack of judgment in their testimony on miracles. They share the credulity and shortcomings of their contemporaries.

Later historians of the Church support the charges Middleton makes in his pioneering criticism of these eminent Churchmen. Philip Schaff says:

> The church fathers, with all the worthiness of their character in other respects, confessedly lacked a highly cultivated sense of truth, and allowed a certain justification of falsehood ad majorem Dei gloriam, or fraus pia, under the misnomer of policy or accommodation.[1]

3. Other Extraordinary Happenings of the Fourth Century

Middleton commends the senior Henry Dodwell for noticing a difference between the testimony of Chrysostom and Augustine and that

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1. Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity (New ed., revised and enlarged; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1884), II, 463 f.

of certain other churchmen in the fourth century. Like Middleton, Dodwell was less disturbed by the claims of the former two Fathers than by the extravagant stories related by others. The objectionable testimonies come from Athanasius(300-373), Gregory of Nyssa(b. soon after 325), Jerome(343-420), Epiphanius(310?-403), and others.

Examining first the works of Athanasius, Middleton finds ridiculous accounts of miracles in his Life of Antony. In the Preface of his biography of the Egyptian Monk, Athanasius says that he has had firsthand experience of what he writes:

> I was his attendant for a long time, and poured water on his hands; in all points being mindful of the truth, that no one should disbelieve through hearing too much, nor on the other hand by hearing too little should despise the man.[1]

One trifling incident which Middleton selects is Satan's questioning Antony as to why the monks persist in cursing the Devil, since Christ has already stripped him of his power.[2]

Middleton selects the incident from Gregory of Nyssa's biography of his namesake, Gregory Thaumaturgos(d. about 270), where John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary appeared to Thaumaturgos in a vision and gave him a brief verbal account of the mystery of the Godhead. He wrote down what was dictated to him and left a copy with the Church at Neocaesarea, where he was Bishop.

Middleton observes that Daniel Waterland, along with other theologians, accepts the genuineness of the creed revealed to Thaumaturgos.[3]

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1. Wace and Schaff, op. cit., IV, 195.

2. Ibid., cf. p. 207.

3. Waterland, The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, pp. 233 f. Waterland's opinion is appended to his translation of Gregory's dogmatic statement. "The Creed is as express and

His own opinion is that the vision was a forgery put forth to support the truth of the Athanasian position.

He selects from Jerome certain fabulous stories which, he notes, also disturbed the senior Henry Dodwell. Jerome's Life of Paulus the First Hermit tells of the amazing animals which Antony had seen on his way to find Paul:

> Before long in a small rocky valley shut in on all sides he [Antony] sees a manikin with hooked snout, horned forehead, and extremities like goats' feet. When he saw this, Antony like a good soldier seized the shield of faith and the helmet of hope: the creature none the less began to offer him the fruit of the palm-trees to support him on his journey and as it were pledges of peace.[1]

The animal speaks and tells Antony that he represents the mortal beings (Fauns, Satyrs, and Incubi) whom the Gentiles had been deluded to worship. Antony proceeds on his way. When he eventually finds Paul, this incident occurs:

> Thus conversing they noticed with wonder a raven which had settled on the bough of a tree, and was then flying gently down till it came and laid a whole loaf of bread before them. They were astonished, and when it had gone, "See," said Paul, "the Lord truly loving, truly merciful, has sent us a meal. For the last sixty years I have always received half a loaf; but at your coming Christ has doubled his soldier's rations."[2]

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explicite [sic] as possible for the Doctrine of the Trinity, drawn up probably for the obviating all Extremes of that Time, whether of Samosatenians, or Sabellians. Some have questioned the Genuineness of it, but without sufficient Cause

. . . .

If it should now be asked, why other Creeds, older than this one should not be equally explicite [sic], as to the Doctrine of the Trinity, or why the Western formularies were not as minute and express, as some of the Eastern; the Answer is short and easy. There was not the same Occasion.

1. Wace and Schaff, op. cit., VI, 300.

2. Ibid., p. 301.

Epiphanius, the Bishop of Salamis on Cyprus, had a reputation for working miracles. Middleton refers to his declaration that certain fountains and streams--the Nile River, for instance--have miraculously flowed with wine. The historian, Sozomen, relates an incident in which the Salamis Church treasurer, as he is about to rebuke Epiphanius for being so liberal in doling out money to the poor of the city, reaches into the moneybag and finds it filled with gold.[1]

The Free Inquiry gives attention to Chrysostom's account of the burial of the body of Babylas, Bishop of Antioch, in a pagan temple. The body had been removed from metropolitan Antioch and had been placed in the suburban Temple and Oracle of Apollo Daphneus. As soon as the coffin was placed, the Oracle was struck dumb. When the Emperor, Julian, came to inquire of it, it was silent. He ordered the coffin returned to the city. At the moment it was carried out, the roof of the Temple and the statue of the god inside were struck by lightning.

Although Chrysostom spends considerable time relating the blessings and the daily miracles which the remains of martyrs such as Babylas had effected, Middleton observes that this Saint's writings are so fabulous and romantic that the Benedictine editors of his works caution the reader that the story of Babylas is written in a flowery and rhetorical style and is for the most part destitute of truth. In fact, the Papal editors have shown more candor toward Chrysostom than the Protestant historian, Cave. Middleton notes that

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1. Sozomen, A History of the Church in Nine Books(From A.D. 324 to A.D. 440), A New Translation from the Greek with a Memoir of the Author(London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1846), cf. p. 368.

in his Lives of the Most Eminent Fathers of the Church Cave makes this comment on the Babylas account:

> The reader, it is like, may be apt to scruple this story as savouring a little of superstition, and giving too much honour to the relics of saints: to which I shall say no more, than the credit of it seems unquestionable, it being reported not only by Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, (who all lived very near that time,) but by Chrysostom, who was born at Antioch, and was a long time presbyter of that Church, etc. . . . Nor is it improbable that God should suffer such an extraordinary passage to happen, especially at this time, to demonstrate the vanity of the Gentile religion, to correct the infidelity of the emperor, and to give testimony to that religion, which he scorned with so much insolence and sarcasm, and pursued with so much vigour and opposition.[1]

Next in Middleton's examination is an extraordinary event which a Popish critic had reproved him for railing against so vehemently in an earlier work, the vision which Basil, Bishop of Caesarea, had had on the night Julian died. He points out that several saints as well as ordinary men had had a similar vision, and he refers to Sozomen, who devotes the second chapter of Book VI of his ecclesiastical history to them.[2] Middleton attributes the visions, not to extraordinary revelations, but to the changed attitude which the Fathers of the age had toward the civil rulers.[3]

Reflecting on the testimony he has been examining, he summarizes that those who gave it were unscrupulous in relating extraordinary events. Although his contemporaries regard these Churchmen as the most eminent lights of the fourth century and highly respect them because of their learning and piety, he contends that they used these fictions and others like them to promote Christianity and propagate their

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1. Cave, op. cit., I, 371. 2. Sozomen, op. cit., cf. p. 251.
3. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, cf. p. 286.

peculiar rites and doctrines.

His concluding remarks on the miracles of the fourth century repeat his thesis in the Introductory Discourse, that their incredibility adversely affects the miracles of the preceding and succeeding centuries. If those of the fourth century are fabulous, then a fatal blow is struck at all post-Apostolic testimony, the reason being that:

> . . . there is not a single Father, whom I have mentioned in this fourth age, who, for zeal and piety, may not be compared with the best of the more ancient, and for knowledge and learning, be preferred to them all.[1]

Much as he could wish it to be otherwise, he is committed to this conclusion. Though these Fathers devoted their lives to propagating their faith and combating the evils and heresies of their times, they recorded facts, "which no man of sense can believe, and which their warmest admirers are forced to give up as fabulous."[2]

As already indicated, the majority of eighteenth-century divines agreed with these views, but they most often employed the traditional canons of rationalism to discredit the testimony. Critical examination as penetrating as Middleton's was rare.

The biggest disagreement with his remarks was over the view that the later miracles discredit those of the previous centuries. And the critics were cautious about exaggerating the credulity or party-interest of the Fathers.

Brooke examined the testimony which Middleton had unearthed, and his remarks were more an expansion than a criticism of the discussion. He agreed that zeal wreaked havoc on the

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1. Ibid., p. 289. 2. Ibid., p. 290.

Fathers' scruples. The miracle-workers were improperly motivated, and their miracles were frivolous, impertinent, ridiculous, and absurd. There was "so much monstrous extravagance, and shocking impiety in them all; that no man, I think, can so far betray his reason, as to believe them worthy the Majesty and Wisdom of the Almighty."[1]

Although he was convinced that the miracles after the third century give evidence of being fictitious, he was cautious, none the less, about completely ruling out the miraculous element, a caution which has been expressed more recently by Schaff:

> In the face of such witnesses as Ambrose and Augustine, who must be accounted in any event the noblest and most honorable men of the early church, it is venturesome absolutely to deny all the relic-miracles, and to ascribe them to illusion and pious fraud.[2]

A person who sets out to do what the Free Inquiry aimed at must be either venturesome or inconsistent and blind. Middleton was the former, his critics the latter. The veil which for them separates the genuine from the ingenuine miracles is thin and transparent and shows the testimony to the discriminating examiner to be incredible. As Middleton had effectively argued, the criticisms which theologians were making of the miracles of the fourth century apply as well to those of the second and third.

Though eminent churchmen of the fourth century testified to many extraordinary happenings, and somewhat improved on the testimony of the two previous centuries by more often claiming firsthand experience and giving more details, their attestations are surely misinterpretations of effects--whatever the reason or the motive behind the interpretations--

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 337.

2. Schaff, History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity, I, 461.

and in the category of fiction rather than fact.

4. Miracles after the Fourth Century

The discussion which this thesis examines dealt with a few wonders of the fifth and sixth centuries.

Most prominent in the earlier one is Theodoret's account of the pillar-monk, Simeon Stylites. An abridgment of the story follows.

Released from a monastery near Antioch in Syria because of his severe self-disciplines, Simeon went to a cave, where he fasted forty days. He was found in a dying state, and cared for by some friends till he had regained his health. When he had recovered, instead of returning to the cave, he mounted a platform on top of a pillar. He stood on it like a statue. He spent thirty years there. For twenty eight of them he fasted forty days of each year. During his fasts, when he had lost strength to stand, he was supported by a rope which he had tied around himself and had attached to a beam fixed to the top of his pillar. He bowed hundreds of times a day, his head touching his toes. He ate only once a week. From three o'clock in the afternoon till sunset he conversed with the people gathered at the base of the pole, but at sunset he turned to converse with God, and he continued in this conversation till the next afternoon at three. He performed several miracles, and people from the remotest parts of the earth flocked to him.

The bare recital of Simeon's life, Middleton says, "must needs expose the absurdity of believing that it could in any manner be suggested or directed by divine inspiration." [1]

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 299.

Yet, he notes, some clergymen believe it was.

He treats the incident with an argument he uses elsewhere, namely, that it contains both truth and untruth, and that rejecting the miraculous parts of the narrative does not necessitate the rejection of the historical. He corroborates his point with an effective example of his pioneering work in historical criticism. Citing Seutonius's and Tacitus's biographies of the Emperor, Vespasian, he observes that they relate several historical facts which no one doubts. They also relate that Vespasian performed several extraordinary cures on the blind and crippled. Everyone respects these two noted historians as authorities, Middleton contends, but a discriminating reader has reason to discount their accounts of the Emperor's miracles; they should be considered the fruits of the superstition, prejudices, and other corruptions of the times.

The same principles apply to Theodoret and other Church historians, Middleton insists. We take their word, "as far as reason and religion will permit us; and ascribe the rest to the credulity, the prejudices, and erroneous principles, which infected all the writers of those days."[1] Theodoret's works are saturated with these weaknesses; he stocks his Religious History with monks whose ridiculous whims and extravagances are attributed to divine inspiration.

Dodwell takes exception to Middleton's analysis of Theodoret. He believes the account of Simeon Stylites's doings is not as incredible as portrayed. A wrong purpose is assigned to Simeon's wonders; he did not perform them to prove the divine authorization of his austerities, as Middleton seems to believe. It is probable,

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1. Ibid., p. 301.

Dodwell argues, that a good end was served by the miracles, and, therefore, they can be believed. They show nothing unworthy the wisdom and goodness of Providence.[1]

Dodwell's presumptions add another segment to his monotonous string of flimsy criticism. He was blind to what Middleton had said a scientific inquirer sees, and what Schaff more recently warned against in his comments on Theodoret and his contemporaries, Anthony and Cosmos, who also testify to the miracles of Simeon Stylites:

> . . . we should not be bribed or blinded by the character and authority of such witnesses, since experience sufficiently proves that even the best and most enlightened men cannot wholly divest themselves of superstition and of the prejudices of their age.[2]

Middleton next takes the opportunity to refute six articles which Chapman had said credit the miracles of the fifth century. In summary they are: that the miracles were publicly performed, that they had beneficial effects, that they served noble ends, that the witnesses were reliable and accurate and trustworthy, that the miracles were attended by as strong evidence as that of most of the ancient miracles, and that they are as easily distinguished from the Popish ones as gold is from brass, or light from darkness.

Middleton sets these objections over against Chapman's defense:

> 1. That they were all of such a nature, and performed in such a manner, as would necessarily inject a suspicion of fraud and delusion.
>
> 2. That the cures and beneficial effects of them, were either false, or imaginary, or accidental.

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1. W. Dodwell, A Free Answer, cf. p. 94.

2. Schaff, History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity, I, 461.

3. That they tend to confirm the idlest of all errors and superstitions.

4. That the integrity of the witnesses is either highly questionable, or their credulity at least so gross, as to render them unworthy of any credit.

5. That they were not onely [sic] vain and unnecessary, but generally speaking, so trifling also as to excite nothing but contempt.

6. And lastly, that the belief and defence of them, are the onely [sic] means in the world, that can possibly support, or that does in fact give any sort of countenance, to the modern impostures in the Romish Church.[1]

Chapman's defense of monkery gives Middleton another opportunity to criticize the fifth century. The former's position is that monkery had been instituted for a good purpose, that the friends of Christianity must regard the ancient monks as the best examples of Christian character, and that the monastic system in its institution was far removed from the modern corruptions of Popery.

Middleton replies that he considers the institution of monkery to be contrary to the Gospel and to the interests of society, "and the chief source of all the corruptions, which have ever since infested the Christian Church."[2] Further, he feels that the modern monks have the preference over the earlier ones, in discipline, learning, and rationality. Theodoret is a good example of the bigotry and superstition in which the first monks were nurtured. Certain incidents extracted from his biographies of Peter and James enforce Middleton's question whether anyone so prejudiced can be an authority on facts like miracles.

Before he dismisses Theodoret, Middleton betrays his professional

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 306. 2. Ibid., p. 307.

jealousy. Contrasting the Roman Catholic Historian, Du Pin, who is suspicious of Theodoret, and the Protestant Divine, Chapman, who thinks that to disbelieve him is to jeopardize historical evidence, Middleton writes caustically:

> The fortunes of these two writers were as different also as their principles: the candor of the Papist being thought too favorable to Protestantism, was censured and disgraced by the Popish Bishops; the zeal of the Protestant, tending directly to Popery, was extolled and rewarded by the Protestant Bishops.[1]

Although he feels that his examination of Theodoret and his criticism of Chapman adequately condemn the miracles of the fifth century, Middleton turns to another. He examines the regained conversing ability of certain North African Christians whose tongues Hunneric the Vandal, a subscriber to the Arian position, had in 484 ordered cut out at the root. Detailed evidence testifies that almost all the persons abused regained a normal speaking ability. Two are known not to have, and one who had never spoken before the extraction talked afterwards. One or mor was seen and heard as far away as Constantinople.

Middleton begins his examination of this incident by criticizing William Berriman's treatment of it. The latter examines the episode in his Lady Moyer's lectures, An Historical Account of the Trinitarian Controversy. He prefaces his remarks with a statement which resembles Chapman's defense of Theodoret's account of Simeon Stylites, and which resembles repeated replies to Middleton:

> I am not insensible that miracles have often been pretended in these later ages, which may be justly called in question, as being both obscurely performed, and insufficiently attested. But this is related with such publick

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1. Ibid., p. 313.

> [sic] circumstances, and attested by such competent witnesses, that I see not how we can discredit it, without shaking the whole faith of history, and rejecting all accounts of miracles besides the scriptural.[1]

The evidence that the Christians whose tongues had been cut out talked is irrefutable, Berriman holds. The extraction did not happen to a single person, but to a number of the inhabitants of a well-known city in Mauritania. The regaining of the ability to speak was not a one-day or a two-days wonder, but continued as long as the martyrs lived. The two exceptions were not granted the privilege of speaking because they had acted immorally. The evidence from Constantinople clinches the case, because there, what befell the martyrs "was examined by such as knew the world, and whose testimony leaves no ground for an imposture."[2]

Middleton believes otherwise, and he presents an interesting defense. He acknowledges that certain of the North Africans were seen and heard speaking distinctly. However, he believes that the regaining of the ability to speak can be explained without recourse to anything miraculous. In the first place, it is possible that a complete extraction of the tongue was not effected:

> . . . though their tongues were ordered to be cut to the roots, and are said to have been so cut, yet the sentence might not be so strictly executed, as not to leave, in some of them, such a share of that organ, as was sufficient in a tolerable degree, for the use of speech.[3]

Secondly, the explanation that two of them failed to

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1. William Berriman, An Historical Account of the Controversies That Have Been in the Church, Concerning . . . the Trinity (London: 1725), p. 327.

2. Ibid., p. 328.

3. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 341.

speak again because God was punishing them for immoralities is forced and improbable. Next, the case of the person who had been dumb from birth, but who after the loss of his tongue had acquired a capacity to speak, is suspect. It sounds as if this marvel were promoted by "art and contrivance, to enhance the lustre of the miracle."[1]

Middleton proceeds with a scientific argument. He begins by observing that men have usually considered the tongue an indispensable organ of intelligible speech. Thus, in the credulous age when the miracle under consideration supposedly took place--when orthodox Christians welcomed the slightest wonder which challenged the Arian doctrine--people assumed without examination that when those whose tongues had been cut out spoke, they were doing something miraculous. If more thorough examinations of tongueless people had been possible in the fifth century, the case of the North Africans might have proved less extraordinary.

He goes on to illustrate. Medical testimony from the annals of the Academy of Science in Paris records two cases of persons speaking without a tongue, the one a girl who had been born without it and yet had learned to talk distinctly, and the other a boy whose tongue had been destroyed by disease, and he had accomplished the same feat as the girl. Therefore, Middleton challenges, let Berriman defend the miracle being discussed with all the power of his learning. He will not be able to obscure the fact that it, "like all the other fictions, which have been imposed upon the world, under that character, owed its whole credit to our ignorance of the powers

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1. Ibid., p. 341.

of nature."[1]

Middleton's critics attacked his investigation. They saw no connection between the evidence from the Academy of Paris and the case of those whom Hunneric had abused. Dodwell accuses him of faulty reasoning in introducing the Paris evidence, and he criticizes him for being satisfied with such scanty support:

> Those who give Credit to every Relation in Philosophical Transactions, and much more who from a Case reported for its Singularity, argue upon it as the common course of Nature, should be tender of charging others with Superstition and Facility of Belief, or with want of Judgment and weak Reasonings.[2]

He cannot believe Middleton is sincere in posing the Paris cases against the miracle under consideration.

Toll's defense of Middleton disturbed Dodwell and evoked additional criticism. Toll made the following comment on the occasion of this miracle(to support the Athanasian view): "I cannot help being diffident, whether God has ever so infallibly determined the Athanasian position to be true, as the working Miracles in its Favour must be construed to imply."[3] He adds that all the miracles claimed in support of this position reflect on the wisdom of God, "as if he did Things by Halves, to suppose it necessary for him to work Miracles in order to ascertain the Sense of those Scriptures [which clearly expound the Trinity]."[4]

Dodwell considers Toll's position dangerous. If ever divine care and protection of a doctrine were necessary, it was so in the

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1. Ibid., p. 316.
2. W. Dodwell, A Free Answer, p. 97.
3. Toll, op. cit., p. 82. 4. Ibid., p. 82.

case of the Athanasian position. Therefore, the miracle of the North African Christians regaining the ability to speak is not incredible.

The weakness of this kind of reply has been sufficiently exposed before.

What remained was for Dodwell to prove the miracle credible. Neither he nor any of Middleton's other critics could. The kind of defense which they manufactured in the attempt is aptly criticized in the remarks of Warfield, quoted earlier[1], on the power of preconceived theory to blind men to facts.

Middleton closes his examination of the miracles of the fourth and later centuries by classifying them all in one category, "the mere effects of fraud and imposture."[2] The corruptness and degeneracy of the Church at the end of the fourth century gave rise to them. As corruptions increased, the miracles urged in favor of the doctrines became more fraudulent.

The blame for propagating the fictitious miracles rests ultimately with the Fathers, Middleton repeats. They trained the ages in which they lived to a blind credulity and superstition, and they themselves were subject to the afflictions and superstitions of the age. Whether they were deluded, or forged the fictions to which they testified, or disbelieved them but affirmed them in order to advance their cause, the fact remains that they attested shocking things, and recorded miracles, "which from the mere incredibility of them, appear at first sight to be fabulous."[3]

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1. Cf. p. 18.

2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 316. 3. Ibid., p. 317.

Few eighteenth-century divines were as bold as Middleton in criticizing the Fathers, though many of them hesitated to accept the testimony on the miracles of the fourth and subsequent centuries. They agreed that superstition and credulity had begun to afflict the Church early, and that the Fathers had not been innoculated against these irrationalities. He meets with insignificant objection, therefore, when he says that the miracles of the fourth century are indicative of what to expect in the subsequent ages.

The primary objections to his remarks were either against his estimation of the characters of the Fathers, or against the method by which he had arrived at his conclusions. Seldom are the objections valid, and most frequently they are inadequate. The logical maneuvers of the rationalizing critics do not obscure the facts that the later miracles were unreal, and that the testimony on them reads like fiction.

The position which Middleton challenged the English divines to be objective enough to adopt has been stated more recently by B. B. Warfield:

> . . . what we find, when we cast our eye over the whole body of Christian legends, growing up from the third century down through the Middle Ages, is merely a reproduction, in Christian form, of the motives, and even the very incidents, which already meet us in the legends of heathenism.[1]

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1. Warfield, op. cit., p. 83.

PART III THE EFFECTS

CHAPTER VII

CHALLENGE AND CONSEQUENCE

1. The Persistence of Rationalism in Theological Discussion in England in the Eighteenth Century
   (1.) In the Replies to Hume
   (2.) In Hugh Farmer
   (3.) In the Lardner-Paley School and Others
2. The Encouragement of Scepticism
   (1.) Scepticism in Middleton
   (2.) Middleton and the Sceptics
3. The Emerging Evangelicalism

The historian, Gibbon(1737-1794), commenting once on the critical outlook of churchmen in the first half of the eighteenth century, suggested that theological truth is to be extracted by an approach which moves somewhere between the extremes of the credulity and incredulity which were then to be found respectively in the Vatican Librarian, Cardinal Baronius, and the free-thinker, Conyers Middleton:

> The intermediate gradations [between Baronius and Middleton] would be filled by a line of ecclesiastical critics, whose rank has been fixed by the circumstances of their temper and studies, as well as by the spirit of the church or society to which they were attached . . . . If we skilfully combine the passions and prejudices, the hostile motives and intentions, of the various theologians, we may frequently extract knowledge from credulity, moderation from zeal, and impartial truth from the most disingenuous controversy.[1]

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1. Edward Gibbon, The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon Esq., Complete in One Volume(London: B. Blake, 1837), p. 747.

The impression Middleton's writings made on those who were in the "intermediate gradations" and on those who registered at the extremities of Gibbon's yardstick will be the subject of this chapter.

1. The Persistence of Rationalism in Theological Discussion in England in the Eighteenth Century

The evidence that rationalism was entrenched in theological discussion early in the eighteenth century in England has already been presented. It was before the reader in the examination of the discussion previous to Middleton's writings, and again in the examination of the replies to him.

Rationalism persisted in the second half of the century. Leslie Stephen, analyzing the weaknesses of the replies to Middleton, suggests why:

> The hollowness in theory and the impotence in practice of English speculation in the last half of the century, is but the natural consequence of the faintheartedness which prevented English thinkers from looking facts in the face.[1]

The consequence of which Stephen wrote showed up in at least three theological developments.

(1.) In the Replies to Hume

The evidence that rationalism persisted in English theological discussion after the time of Middleton's publications is seen first in the replies to Hume. Those who answered him usually had something to say to Middleton, and they showed as deep an entrenchment in rationalism as the latter's critics.

Hume's work on miracles, being more philosophical than his-

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1. Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (2d ed.; London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1881), I, 315.

torical, was therefore more solicitous of a rationalist's reply. His position is that the rational evidence for a miracle is nil, and that the empirical evidence votes against one. To review, his argument runs thus: a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; the evidence that one has happened is derived from the testimony of men; the testimony of men is based on experience; at the same time, experience has discovered the laws of nature to be uniform, and so to be against a miracle; no testimony, therefore, is sufficient to establish that one has happened.

Dealing with human testimony as it relates to the degrees of evidence, he argues that assurance depends on the conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. The evidence is to be regarded as a proof or a probability, depending upon whether the connection between any particular report and any particular phenomenon has been found to be constant or variable. The connection between the testimony on, and the experience of, the uniformity of nature is constant. The connection between the testimony that a miracle has happened and the experience that nature is uniform is variable. A piece of evidence is to be regarded as a probability if a doubt is involved. Since experience is against a miracle, a proof with no probability involved contradicts it, and the evidence from the testimony for it does not amount to a probability, let alone a proof. Testimony may be for a miracle, but experience is against it. And the superior weight of evidence rests with experience, for it is the evidence of the senses.

No miracle has ever been established by sufficient evidence, he insists. He suggests four reasons why. The first is that history

does not offer a miracle which has been attested by a sufficient number of reliable witnesses. The second is that human nature is subject to the "passion of surprise and wonder."[1] The religious spirit united with this passion means the end of common sense, and thereby the destruction of human testimony as evidence. History verifies his conclusion, he contends:

> The many instances of forged miracles and prophecies and supernatural events, which, in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind.[2]

The third argument against testimony as evidence is that reports of supernatural and miraculous wonders flourish among ignorant and barbarous nations.

The fourth consideration is that no testimony has ever been put forth for the miraculous prodigies of history which has not been opposed by a superior number of witnesses to the contrary, thereby destroying the credit of the former testimony.

The conclusion on this matter sums up the reasoning of the essay:

> Upon the whole, then, it appears that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof, derived from the very nature of the fact which it would endeavour to establish. It is experience only which assures us of

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1. David Hume, The Philosophical Works of David Hume (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1854), IV, 33.

2. Ibid., p. 134.

> the laws of nature. When therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but to subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this subtracting with regard to all popular religions amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore, we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.[1]

In spite of the fact that experience is against a miracle, and human testimony is incapable of proving that one has happened, he faintly admits the possibility of one, or at least the violation of the usual course of nature. A miracle may even admit of proof from human testimony, though it will perhaps be impossible to find any such event recorded in any historical writing. Turning specifically to the evidences of the Christian Faith, he makes a curious statement similar to that which had been made by the second Henry Dodwell, and which has been noticed in this thesis.[2] He admits that miracles are a part of the evidence of Christianity, but they are subjective evidence:

> . . . upon the whole, we may conclude, that the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity; and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.[3]

The question which the closing words of Hume's Essay raise is, To whose experience does he refer? One of his critics, George Campbell, asked this question. And Hume, on the rare occasion when

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1. Ibid., p. 146. 2. Cf. p. 35.

3. Hume, op. cit., p. 150.

he reversed his previously declared intention of never replying to a critic, wrote Campbell, "No man can have any other experience but his own. The experience of others becomes his only by the credit which he gives to their testimony, which proceeds from his own experience of human nature."[1]

The kind of defense evoked by Hume's work gave transparent evidence that the rationalist theologians were not yet ready to apply Middleton's method to the testimony on miracles or to the witnesses to them. William Adams, John Douglas, and George Campbell, the trio of theologians who presented extensive replies to Hume, argued that real miracles are credible because of one of the following reasons: the authority of reliable testimony; the reasonability of the facts or doctrines being attested; the way the miracles were performed and their results; the circumstances under which the testimony was given; or some virtuous recommendation or innate qualification of the witnesses.

The apologists' argument was that there are no grounds for denying the existence of a Supernatural Being who is disposed to interfere in the order of the universe. This admission makes miracles possible. Since experience is not against a miracle, then the next consideration is the testimony.

Adams makes certain concessions to Hume here. He admits that the evidence which testimony contributes to the credibility of a miracle must at last be resolved into experience. But he insists that it is an entirely different kind of experience from that which gives probability to a natural or common fact. Testimonial experience is to

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1. George Campbell, A Dissertation on Miracles . . . With a Correspondence on the Subject (Edinburgh: Walker & Greig, 1784), p. 7.

be evaluated in the light of what goes on within oneself. Since he and Hume are in accord on these points, Adams suddenly interjects that his design is not to contest the author's principles, "but to shew [sic] that his style and manner of writing tend to embarrass the subject, and perplex the reader."[1]

As with Middleton's critics, so with Hume's, an attack on the method of reasoning is considered an adequate refutation of the conclusions that have been reached.

Adams attempts to separate what he says Hume confuses, experience and testimony. However, he makes a distinction where there appears to be no difference. He argues that experience is testimony to the credibility of a fact, while testimony gives direct evidence to the reality of the fact. Where there is no reason to suspect the testimony, the truth of the fact is to be presumed. Agreeing with the principle to which Middleton subscribes, that testimony cannot alter the nature of things, he says that testimony can nevertheless make improbable things probable, and testimony can provide a proof of what is possible or in the slightest degree credible. "Where a cause is assigned equal to any effect," he reasons, "the event is rendered credible upon common testimony, and sometimes probable without any."[2]

Hume had held that a cause equal to an effect cannot be so assigned as to prove that a miracle had been performed. If his point is granted, then the examination of the "common testimony" is futile. If Adams's point is granted, then, as Middleton insists, the common testimony needs further investigation.

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1. William Adams, An Essay in Answer to Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles (3d ed.; London: 1767), pp. 9 f.

2. Ibid., pp. 30 f.

In the Criterion John Douglas argues for the credibility of miracles on the basis of their possibility and probability. Then he distinguishes between those which can be explained by natural causes and those which must be attributed to supernatural intervention. He insists that the ones which Hume and Middleton have discredited are in the first category and do not affect the miracles of Scripture. His guiding principle is, "Never attribute any event to a miraculous interposition, when we can trace the operation of natural, adequate causes."[1]

Douglas's statement testifies to the fact that the scepticism which developed in theological discussion in the nineteenth century had a counterpart in the rationalism of the eighteenth. Analyzing the discussions among the rationalists and semi-rationalists in the second half of Middleton's century, Lecky comments:

> . . . it is well worthy of notice that the very first direction which these speculations invariably take --the very sign and characteristic of their action--is an attempt to explain away the miracles of Scripture.[2]

Campbell argued that the credibility of facts is not determined by experience alone: "Testimony has a natural and original influence on belief, antecedent to experience."[3] The earliest assent which a child gives to testimony is previous to experience; so, "There are, and must be in human nature, some original grounds of belief, beyond which researches cannot proceed, and of which therefore it is vain to attempt a rational account."[4]

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1. John Douglas, The Criterion(New ed. by W. Marsh; Colchester: Swinborne and Walter, 1824), p. 127.

2. William Edward Hartpole Lecky, History of the Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe(New ed.; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1892), I, 169.

3. Campbell, op. cit., pp. 17 f.

4. Ibid., p. 18.

Campbell's position would have come under criticism by Middleton, who had insisted that experience and observation determine the credibility of facts and witnesses, and, therefore, all evidence that is beyond research is invalid for establishing a historical fact.

The witnesses received the same kind of vindication by Hume's critics as they had by Middleton's Adams says that it is easy to determine whether a person is giving credible testimony, because the principles that determine the matter are a part of human nature; we experience them in ourselves as well as observe them in others.

Middleton had argued that the same school of experience teaches that human nature is disposed to deceive and be deceived.

To Adams, deception is not a strong objection to testimony. Witnesses to facts that are visible and observable know whether they see them or not. A person in love with the truth and concerned with propagating it does not deceive. Religious instruction, he argues, corrects the make-up of human nature which Hume says discredits the testimony of a witness, and, "Right notions of the divine nature and perfections, which religion teaches, are a necessary help to distinguish true miracles from false."[1]

When Hume's critics deal with miracles historically, they show an attitude which is slightly more discriminating against the immediate post-Apostolic miracles than was evident before his or Middleton's publications. Adams admits a difference between the Scriptural and later ecclesiastical miracles, and he is sceptical about those of the Roman Church; they are questionable because they do not have the same quality of evidence as those of Scripture. Further, "There were not the same

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1. Adams, op. cit., p. 47.

antecedent reasons for working them, nor the same great consequences attending them."[1] He is cautious about applying these conclusions to the miracles of the immediate post-Apostolic age; what he has said is true, "tho' not with equal force, of the miracles recorded in the church before the times of Popery."[2] He feels it unnecessary to defend any miracles but those of Jesus and His Apostles. He admits that, "Men may be prejudiced, even by piety and virtue, to such opinions as are thought favourable to piety and virtue, and where any thing is thought of good tendency, may think it good to believe it."[3]

With this statement he approximates Hume's and Middleton's canon for evaluating miracles. Unfortunately, he is neither as frank nor as consistent in applying it.

Douglas, like Adams, will not allow that the witnesses of the post-Apostolic miracles are on the same level as the earlier witnesses. He partly agrees with Middleton that prejudice prompted many of the former, but he also allows that the first three centuries had individuals who were qualified to testify to genuine miracles. He is convinced that the aura of integrity had disappeared by the fourth and fifth centuries. With him, divine inspiration is a clue to genuine miracles--apparently to the disregard of what the testimony may conclude for or against them.

Whereas Adams and Douglas straddle Middleton's position, Campbell stands at a distance. He is not as much in agreement as the other two. He is alarmed by the arguments against the Primitive

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1. Ibid., p. 104. 2. Ibid., p. 104. 3. Ibid., p. 106.

testimony, fearing that if the miracles of the Early Church are rejected according to Middleton's principles, then the ones in Scripture are in danger. He notices the insistence that the criticisms of the ones in question are not to be applied to the genuine ones, but he feels that Middleton's supposed detection of forgeries among the Fathers raises questions about the Scriptural accounts. He evades a positive judgment, saying that he will neither patronize nor completely ignore Middleton's investigations, but he is concerned that the reader be aware of the consequences of the conclusions in the Free Inquiry.

Hume's critics forged out no better tools for dealing adequately with the historical testimony on miracles than their predecessors in the first half of the century had used. They were content to criticize methods of arguing, and they exaggerated the consequences of empiricism. The treatment is unsatisfactory. The approach to Hume, as to Middleton, is by way of both inadequate arguments and an inadequate method.

Rationalism persisted in theological discussion after the publication of Middleton's writings, as the foregoing examination of the replies to Hume has shown. It persisted in other discussions on miracles as well.

(2.) In Hugh Farmer

Hugh Farmer wrote a Dissertation on Miracles, which was published in 1771. His position is semi-rationalist, subscribing to common sense and opening wider the channels of scepticism. He argues that although Christianity is intrinsically excellent, its proper proof is miracles. God alone performs them, doing it Himself or designating others.

The circumstances which determine whether miracles are divine credentials occur:

> . . . when it clearly appears, that they are wrought at the instance, or in favour of a person, who claims a mission from God, delivers a message in his name, and appeals to those works, before or during the time of their performance, in proof of the divinity of his mission and doctrine.[1]

He is not specific on the subject of continuing miracles, but he acknowledges that Middleton influences his thinking on the matter. He holds that the Apostles conferred miraculous gifts on believers, but he does not indicate how long he thinks they were effective. He observes that the Fathers approached Scripture with preconceived opinions, and he quotes Middleton in support of his view that they borrowed their ideas concerning the continuing miraculous powers and the operations of demons from their pagan environment, and they forged innumerable miracles in support of their doctrines.

Middleton's scientific impulse has had some effect on Farmer.

Stephen makes the following comment on Hume's critics and Farmer:

> . . . their arguments are interesting illustrations of the attitude taken up by the apologists imbued with the spirit of semi-rationalist theology. Equally averse to any belief in the continuous manifestation of supernatural agency, and to a denial of its former manifestation, they were exposed to two fires. They had at once to oppose Wesley and Hume; though Hume, of course, was for the time the most prominent in their thoughts; and the real problem was that which troubled Farmer--the discovery of a critical canon capable of being turned against enemies of either class.[2]

The persistence of rationalism is seen in still another channel of English thought in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

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1. Hugh Farmer, A Dissertation on Miracles (New ed.; Edinburgh: 1798), p. 353.

2. Stephen, op. cit., I, 397.

(3.) In the Lardner-Paley School and Others

Another significant discussion on miracles in the second half of the century developed among a group of Cambridge professors, of whom William Paley(1743-1805) is generally recognized as the most influential and systematic. Two immediate predecessors who influenced this group were Edmund Law, whose Considerations on the Theory of Religion was published in 1745, and Nathaniel Lardner, whose five volumes of The Credibility of the Gospel History were published between 1727-1743. With Law the influence of science on theology begins to appear. Not content to establish Christian truth solely on the basis of its internal reasonableness, he is anxious to see it supported by miracles.

Lardner reasons similarly. Both external and internal evidences are necessary to support the credibility of the Gospel. It is interesting to note what he classifies in these categories:

> The internal evidence depends on the probability of the things related, the consistency of the several parts, and the plainness and simplicity of the narration. The external evidence consists of the concurrence of other ancient writers of good credit, who lived at or near the time, in which many things are said to have happened; and who bear testimony to the books themselves, and their authors, or the facts contained in them.[1]

The Gospel miracles are credible, he maintains, because of the circumstances under which they were performed and because they served the purpose of authenticating the disciples, enabling them to convince others of "the excellent and important doctrine of the Gospel."[2]

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1. Nathaniel Lardner, The Credibility of the Gospel History (London: S. Chadwick & Co., 1847), I, iii.

2. Ibid., p. 87.

Paley's The Evidences of Christianity was published in 1794, and it contains frequent and lengthy quotes from Lardner. The former quickly indicates the premise upon which he proceeds: "In a word, once believe that there is a God, and miracles are not incredible."[1] His argument for the existence of God, clearly outlined in his later Natural Theology, is that of contrivance or design. As a watch presupposes a watchmaker, so contrivance and design presuppose a contriver or designer, consciousness and thought, or personality. Natural theology facilitates a belief in the fundamental articles of revelation, which discloses the particulars.

A moral view of the universe assumes the probability of a revelation, and, "In what way can a revelation be made but by miracles?"[2] An economy in the performance of miracles is reasonable; they should be confined to important occasions and the experience of a few. Rational agents ask only for a sufficient power and an adequative motive for a miracle, not numerous examples. Further, the witnesses must be reliable. This fact favors the Christian miracles:

> . . . there is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.[3]

Without examining whether the evidence holds for the post-Apostolic miracles, and ignoring any previous scientific examinations, Paley partly infers the genuineness of the Gospel miracles from the reports that the miraculous powers continued:

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1. George Fisk, Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity, Comprising the Text by Paley(6th ed.; Cambridge: J.Hall and Son,1875),p. 7.

2. Ibid., p. 2. 3. Ibid., p. 9.

> That the original story was miraculous, is very fairly also inferred from the miraculous powers which were laid claim to by the Christians of the succeeding ages. If the accounts of these miracles be true, it was a continuation of the same powers; if they be false, it was an imitation, I will not say, of what had been wrought, but of what had been reported to have been wrought, by those who preceded them. That imitation should follow reality, fiction should be grafted upon truth; that, if miracles were performed at first, miracles should be pretended afterwards: agrees so well with the ordinary course of human affairs, that we can have no great difficulty in believing it. The contrary supposition is very improbable, namely, that miracles should be pretended to by the followers of the Apostles and first emissaries of the religion, when none were pretended to, either in their own persons or that of their Master, by these Apostles and emissaries themselves.[1]

Paley nowhere indicates that Middleton's and Hume's inquiries had influenced him.

Richard Watson(1737-1816) and John Hey(1734-1815) followed in line with Lardner and Paley. Watson accepted the miracles as the chief external evidences of Christianity, and argued that they are credible because reliable and competent witnesses had attested them. The same holds true for the post-Apostolic miracles. In addition, the latter had continued because of a need for them:

> By the effect of miracles during the lives of the first Preachers, public curiosity was excited, and they obtained an audience which they could not otherwise have commanded. Their power of working miracles was transmitted to their successors, and continued until the purposes of infinite Wisdom were accomplished. They decreased in number in the second century, and left but a few traces at the close of the third.[2]

Watson comments on the controversy over the post-Apostolic miracles. He cites Gibbon, accusing him of borrowing his objections from Middleton, whose belief in Christianity Watson suspects. He is of the opinion that John Wesley had presented the best of any replies to

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1. Ibid., p. 59.

2. Richard Watson, The Works of the Rev. Richard Watson(London: John Mason, 1836), IX, 322.

Middleton, and he adds, "It is a triumph to state, that Dr. Middleton felt himself obliged to give up his ground by shifting the question."[1]

Watson's observations are superficial. He recognizes neither the merit of Middleton's criticisms nor the shortcomings of Wesley's reply, and he offers no adequate reason for asserting that Middleton shifts ground. Possibly he is referring to certain inferior arguments in the Vindication, but this later work does not divert attention from Middleton's original stand.

Hey's treatment of the Christian miracles differs little from Watson's. However, he is not of the same mind about the post-Apostolic wonders. He is critical, and he attributes the Fathers' accounts to credulity and deception. By accepting evidence which seemed to support their cause, the Early Churchmen have left their successors the difficult task "of clearing the Reality from all that rubbish, under which it is buried."[2] He would not go as far as Middleton, who, he believes, shows too little respect for the Fathers. He is not certain just how far he would go, but he is fearful lest Middleton's charges against the post-Apostolic testimony be applied against that of Scripture.

As the foregoing examination points out, the rationalist English theologians in the second half of the eighteenth century treaded on tiptoe. As a result, they provoked little controversy. The following comment by Pattison suggests why:

> The clergy continued to manufacture evidence as an ingenious exercise, a literature which was avowedly professional, a study which might seem theology without being it,

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1. Ibid., p. 322.

2. John Hey, Lectures in Divinity: Delivered in the University of Cambridge (Cambridge: 1796), I, 117.

> which could awaken none of the scepticism then dormant beneath the surface of society. Evidences are not edged tools; they stir no feeling; they were the proper theology of an age whose literature consisted in writing Latin hexameters. The orthodox school no longer dared to scrutinize the contents of revelation. The preceding period [the first half of the century] had eliminated the religious experience, the Georgian [1750-1830] had lost besides the power of using the speculative reason.[1]

As Pattison notes, rationalism persisted among English theologians into the nineteenth century. The scientific impulse had not yet been appropriated. The literary and historical achievements which were coming to birth in Germany were hardly conceived in England.

Writing a century after the appearance of Middleton's works, the English theologian, John Henry Cardinal Newman(1801-1890), vindicated the miracles of Scripture by the traditional arguments, and he used the same in an attempt to remove the force of the criticism which Douglas, Middleton, and Gibbon had assembled against the later miracles. He apologizes for the testimony of the Fathers thus: "They did not see that evidence would become a science, that doubt would be thought a merit, and disbelief a privilege."[2]

Another theologian of the nineteenth century, J. B. Mozley(1813-78), considered it unnecessary to make a critical examination of witnesses who are reputedly honest and of a sufficient understanding:

> . . . the truth of their reports is implied and included in this original observation respecting the men themselves, and may be depended upon so far as this observation may be depended upon. It is true we believe many things which we are told without previous knowledge of the persons who are our

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1. Mark Pattison, Essays(Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1889), II, pp. 49 f.

2. John Henry Cardinal Newman, Two Essays on Biblical and on Ecclesiastical Miracles(10th ed.; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), pp. 226 f.

> informants, but ordinarily we assume honesty and competency in men, unless we have reason to suppose the contrary.[1]

The English rationalist theologians in the late eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth failed to combine successfully the elements which Middleton had insisted upon make up the proper tools for evaluating historical records. The combination which he prescribed and fairly well employed has proved to be effective. His analysis of it and confidence in it are shared in the following remarks on Biblical criticism by C. H. Dodd:

> It is a rational and scientific discipline, and its findings are true or untrue according to the evidence in each particular case. If such findings are often tentative or uncertain, it is because of the nature of the subject-matter, and such uncertainty does not discredit the method. The results may be challenged on this point or that: it is a matter of evidence and of the competence of the person who is dealing with it. As a special branch of study it aims at being objective, rational, scientific. Its methods may in future be improved, its presuppositions revised, but it stands firm as a self-justifying part of the reasonable search for knowledge, and its abandonment would be a 'flight from reason'.[2]

2. The Encouragement of Scepticism

A streak of scepticism was evident in England in the latter part of the eighteenth century. It was not unheralded. Scepticism had smouldered in theological discussion throughout the earlier part of the century. It had been fanned by the writings of the deists, and had been evident also among certain theologians who were considered orthodox. Middleton showed some affinity to it.

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1. J. B. Mozley, Eight Lectures on Miracles(4th ed.; London: Rivingtons, 1878), p. 93.

2. C. H. Dodd, The Bible Today(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 25.

In addition to the deistic controversy, scientific progress was encouraging scepticism. There were slight evidences of a scientific approach to history and philosophy and a faint conception of the value of historical criticism.

When the free-thinkers first applied the scientific method to theology, strong blows seemed to be wielded on orthodoxy. The presuppositions which had given foundation to the Christian Creed seemed to be damaged. In the hands of Hume and Middleton, the method tended to restrict a belief in the miraculous.

Hume especially challenged the orthodox dogmatist. He left him without a logical proof of the fundamental tenet of a deistic or a theistic religion. He reasons that the traditional proofs which natural theology offers for the existence of God are inconclusive and inconsistent. No being's existence is logically demonstrable. The only discovery that can be made of a being is from what it produces, and, at that, the inference of cause from effect is limited to such powers and properties as are "exactly sufficient to produce the effect."[1]

Attempts to prove the Deity have been contradictory, he insists. What one group has claimed as a discovery from order in the universe, another has claimed as a discovery from disorder. This observation argues against miracles, and, therefore, against a special revelation.

This reasoning challenged theologians to examine the a priori reasons for expecting miracles, and compelled them to determine to what degree a miracle is miraculous, and how much and what kind of evidence are necessary and valid for proving that one has happened.

The theologians were not yet ready to accept the challenge. In

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1. Hume, op. cit., IV, 155.

addition to offering obsolete presuppositions on the reasons for expecting miracles and applying the unscientific canons of rationalism to the evidence, they sometimes explained away the miraculous element.

(1.) Scepticism in Middleton

It has already been pointed out that Middleton's writings were regarded by many of those who first read them as being the works of a sceptic. However, the history of doctrine and the development of criticism have proved that in some cases his critics exaggerated his scepticism, and in others they imagined it.

As mentioned in the first chapter,[1] William Whiston was outspoken in pronouncing the conclusions of the Free Inquiry sceptical. This deist who had undermined several of the orthodox beliefs considered Middleton's work to be, not one of the most effective attacks on Popery, but "one of the greatest Temptations in the World to it; because of the contempt of the primitive fathers, and the occasion given to scepticism and infidelity."[2] He believed that Middleton did not earnestly accept the authority of the Bible, and he said, "Nor can I suppose him to be a Christian."[3]

Those who made accusations such as these were not entirely without reason, for Middleton had made statements provocative enough to demand serious explanation.

One remark which aroused suspicion, and which he attempted to answer in his Vindication, appears in the Preface of the Free Inquiry. It has already been quoted.[4] It occurs in Middleton's discussion on how to ascertain the credibility of miracles. Presupposing a miracle as a matter-of-fact, he holds that the

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1. Cf. p. 20. 2. Whiston, op. cit., p. 27.

3. Ibid., p. 28. 4. Cf. p. 63.

credibility of facts is easy to ascertain because facts lie open to the examination of reason and the senses. The testimony of observable phenomena such as are involved in a miracle is a part of the testimony of natural revelation and is therefore certified because it is the testimony of God. Since this testimony establishes the credibility of facts, historical testimony cannot make incredible things credible.

The critics summon Middleton to explain himself. He is accused of being impertinent and inconsistent and of denying the proof and the possibility of supernatural activity in the established order of the universe.

In the Vindication he speaks for himself, replying first to the scandal apparently caused by his using the term revelation for the disclosure God has made of Himself in the Creation. He contends that throughout the ages men have recognized a divine disclosure in nature and have called it a revelation, because it reveals something of God's nature, and sometimes something of both God's and man's.

By studying the natural revelation, one finds the authentic method which God has given for discovering knowledge. It is:

> . . . not from authority, or the reports of our fellow creatures, but from the information of the facts, and material objects, which, in his providential distribution of worldly things, he hath presented to the perpetual observation of our senses.[1]

Studying the works of the Creator, one discovers that they are great, noble, and suitable to the majesty of God. Contrast with these evidences the miracles claimed by the Fathers, and the differences between the testimony of God and the testimony of

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 410.

men are immediately evident: the Fathers' claims are minute, trifling, contemptible, and incredible.

Middleton anticipated that his critics would call him a rank deist because of the importance he had assigned to what the Creation teaches about God and man, but he was confident that he was right, and that the Gospel itself must be interpreted in terms of the original revelation in nature; that is, the Gospel considered as the testimony of men.

Dodwell objected to Middleton's satisfaction with the completeness and sufficiency of the code of morality which the natural revelation teaches, and he argued that the application of Middleton's argument to determining how long miracles had continued is improper. He regarded the argument itself faulty. The inability to discover the will of God in every case from the constitution of nature is "the great Point in which Mankind needed Instruction, and therefore needed Revelation."[1] Therefore, to say that the fabric and constitution of the world testify against the giving of visions and revelations is not only to question the necessity of a special revelation, but is also to ridicule the miracles of Christianity.

Dodwell took advantage of certain implications in Middleton's statements, rather than attempt to search out the validity of their application. He could not accept the apparent impingement upon the time-honored conception of revelation, which was the traditional view in the eighteenth century, and which defined it, in the words of John Baillie:

> . . . as communicating a body of knowledge, some part at least of which could be independently obtained, or at least

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1. W. Dodwell, A Free Answer, p. 342.

verified by the 'light of reason and nature', while the remainder was supplemental to what could be so obtained or verified.[1]

Middleton's critics could not see that he was saying only that rationalism is unable to determine how long genuine miracles had lasted. The proper method of discovering the truth in the testimony on the post-Apostolic miracles is not to begin by guessing what God might have thought proper and needful to do with regard to extraordinary supernatural support of the Early Church, nor to suppose that God did what man might have done, but to compare the facts related in regards to this support to the method God used in the Creation. The study of the general revelation will suggest empirical, scientific principles on what proper testimony is, and they will be applicable in the process of deciding how much truth is contained in the testimony on continuing miracles.

Middleton's unfortunate choice of words in expressing himself brought him--to paraphrase a metaphor which Gibbon used in describing him[2]--nearer to being regarded as stranded on the precipices of infidelity than any other statements in his work, with the possible exception of his remarks about the consequences of his findings. His suggestion that the natural revelation is the surest instruction which God has given for the guidance of life gives occasion for suspicion even among those who acquiesce in his position on the post-Apostolic miracles.

As suggested in the last paragraph, his casual attitude toward the consequences of his criticisms led his opponents to accuse him of being sceptical. His remarks are found in his reply to the objection that his treatment of the Fathers' characters damages the authority

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1. John Baillie, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 5.

2. Gibbon, op. cit., cf. p. 747.

of the Scriptures. He argues that the authenticity of the Bible does not depend as exclusively on the Fathers as his opponents suppose, and that facts must be faced, regardless of the consequences:

> . . . if it be natural and necessary, that the craft and credulity of witnesses should always detract from the credit of their testimony; who can help it? or on what is the consequence to be charged, but on that nature and constitution of things, from which it flows? or if the authority of any books be really weakened, by the character which I have given of the Fathers, will it follow from thence, that the Fathers were neither crafty nor credulous? That surely can never be pretended; because the craft and credulity which are charged upon them must be determined by another sort of evidence; not by consequences, but by facts; and if the charge be confirmed by these, it must be admitted as true, how far soever the consequences may reach.[1]

He had expressed a similar view in the Preface to the Free Inquiry. He was convinced that in the search after knowledge, a glimmer of truth which affects the conduct or happiness of a man can do no harm when exposed to the public. He looks upon the discovery of any truth,

> . . . as a valuable acquisition to society; which cannot possibly hurt, or obstruct the good effect of any truth whatsoever: for they all partake of one common essence, and necessarily coincide with each other; and like the drops of rain, which fall separately into the river, mix themselves at once with the stream, and strengthen the general current.[2]

Middleton's 'Who-can-help-it?' attitude is made to look by his critics as if it applies to the authority of the Bible, rather than the authority of the Fathers. Brooke remarks:

> But surely, if the Canon of Scripture be not safe; if his arguments in any degree affect the truth of That, the credit of the Gospel-Miracles must in the same degree be shaken by it. And, I think, every unprejudiced person will see, that the authority of the Books of the New Testament will be rendered

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, pp. 323 f.

2. Ibid., pp. viii f.

> precarious and uncertain, in proportion as the authority of the earlier Fathers is weakened and made contemptible.[1]

He also charges, "The consequences of Dr. Middleton's arguments do in reality expose his own sincerity and consistency, as a Christian."[2]

The value of Brooke's reply depends upon whether the Fathers' testimony on miracles affects their testimony on Scripture, and how important their witness is in settling the canon of Scripture. The matters are not as interrelated as he supposes, and, therefore, Middleton's criticisms neither damage the Gospel miracles nor implicate his Christianity.

The value of Middleton's remarks is in his consistent demand for scientific objectivity. He insists that conclusions must be drawn from facts, rather than withheld or influenced by preconceived views of character. If the Fathers were subject to craft and credulity, and the admission that they were has the consequence of weakening the authority of their testimony, the charges must nevertheless be admitted, and the consequences resolved by some other way than by disregarding the facts. Middleton would resolve the damage--if any be inflicted--by looking at human nature for what it is and looking elsewhere to find support for the authority of the New Testament.

A recent statement by John Knox on the fallacy behind the anxiety and distrust which have often been stirred up as a result of the development of Biblical criticism is relevant to the anxiety and distrust of those who feared the consequences of Middleton's work:

> . . . the blame for a good part of the church's distrust of the biblical critic must be laid upon a false idea, entertained not infrequently by the critic himself, of the importance of the questions of fact with which he is often concerned. . . . Only by the application of the historical

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1. Brooke, op. cit., p. 217. 2. Ibid., p. 223.

> method can any assured knowledge be obtained. But why should we wish it otherwise? There is no reason for anxiety. Just as nothing in Christian life and experience can provide this knowledge, so no essential of Christian faith depends on it.[1]

Middleton foresaw some of the fruits of his method. His critics foresaw, as a result of such researches and remarks as his, nothing but the destruction of a faith in history. Perhaps the best indication that he did not encourage scepticism as significantly as they had anticipated is the increased reliance which has been given to historical testimony as a result of the development of historical criticism, and the emerging of a more realistic distinction between what is a matter of history and what is a matter of faith.

(2.) Middleton and the Sceptics

The orthodox fears of the consequences of certain of Middleton's statements were not entirely without warrant. Some of the sparks of his scepticism set off fires. Two recognized sceptics of the latter part of the eighteenth century who put fuel on the ashes that had been left over from the earlier part of the century and who claimed to have been curiously impressed by Middleton were Edward Gibbon and "Tom" Paine(1737-1809).

There were other attacks on traditional Christianity with which Middleton was more in line than with Gibbon's or Paine's. After the deistic controversy had passed its most heated stage, deism continued to smoulder, and scepticism frequently burned with a semi-orthodox flame. Though some historians hold that the evidential school had completely smothered the deists, F. R. Tennant evaluates the situation more correctly:

> It was because deism had the misfortune to be born in minds of mediocre calibre that it was so easily silenced, and, as an actual movement, quickly passed into oblivion. But though silenced, it was not answered; though dead, it yet speaketh.[2]

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1. Knox, op. cit., pp. 41 f. 2. Tennant, op. cit., p. 96.

One of the milder forms of scepticism in the English Church in the second half of the century was Unitarianism. In the effort to present the Christian Faith as rational, anti-Trinitarianism became attractive. In a discussion on the historical evidences, a belief in the Trinity becomes irrelevant and encumbers the explanation of the evolution of Christianity as a natural series of events. Thus, it was an easy, and to some, an intellectually attractive step from the traditional platform of the evidences-school to the heretical stage of Unitarianism.

Another mild form of scepticism which emerged in the second part of the century was the Subscription Controversy. Certain conscientious theologians who were disposed toward Unitarianism, rather than subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles, seceded from the Established Church.

Further, there were semi-rationalists who were deprecating orthodox doctrines and discrediting the New Testament miracles. Also, there were attacks on the inspiration of the Bible and criticisms of the Gospels not unlike those in Middleton's posthumous works.

Many of the semi-rationalists retained sufficient orthodox language to indicate that they were not identifying themselves with the infidels. That the Church did not brand them sceptics is a curious fact in the history of eighteenth-century thought. Part of the explanation is found in the insipidity of orthodoxy. Stephen comments, "There was undoubtedly scepticism enough amongst the more cultivated classes. When orthodoxy was of so mild a type, indeed, scepticism could afford to be quiescent."[1]

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1. Stephen, op. cit., I, 445.

Scepticism broke out of its quiescence in the writings of Gibbon and Paine.

The former is generally recognized as the first master of what Middleton had advocated and employed, the scientific investigation of history. He said that he had come to a conviction of its validity partly because of Middleton's success with it. He observed that the arguments of the Free Inquiry are superior to those of Middleton's critics.

Middleton's influence on Gibbon was less in thought than in method. Yet, their thinking moved in similar directions. They agreed that the traditional religion--as Middleton was so bold as to suggest--had been established by law and, therefore, was irrefutable; they were also willing to insist that it is based on a revelation. They admitted that it proves intellectually embarrassing to attempt to defend the evidences of the revelation. The first ages were credulous, and this credulity must be recognized, even though it affects the evidence. Free criticism must extend farther back into the first ages of Christianity than the traditional clergymen were willing to extend it.

Both Middleton and Gibbon, thus, were precursors of the scientific treatment of history, and especially of the history of religious development.

Their historical inquiries are not equally objective. Besides not being thoroughly empirical in his arguments, Middleton acknowledges his sympathy with the cause which he says motivated men to fabricate the history of miracles, and he indicates that his personal faith is deeper than a coating of belief in facts supported by fairly reliable historical evidence. Gibbon reflects no timidity about

his scientific objectivity in the treatment of Christianity. He indicates no passion for the cause, and he relates that the experience which effected his acquiescence to it had been primarily an intellectual struggle over historical criteria, followed by an intellectual retreat from doctrinal error.

When he comments on Middleton's influence on him, Gibbon does not hesitate to express his opinion of the former's scepticism. The colorful analogy at the beginning of this chapter is his judgment in one place.

He traces his initial indebtedness to Middleton back to his university days. At Oxford he was appalled at the spiritual negligence, and he remarks, "The blind activity of idleness urged me to advance without armour into the dangerous mazes of controversy."[1] When he entered these labyrinths, he discovered Middleton and learned that his name was unpopular. The controversy over continuing miracles was on, and he observes that "the two dullest of their champions [William Dodwell and Thomas Church] were crowned with academic honors by the University of Oxford."[2]

Middleton's historical arguments expedited his conversion. Reading him and the French Clergyman, Bossuet, he developed a transitory interest in Roman Catholicism. At the age of sixteen, he wandered into what he calls "the errors of the Church of Rome."[3]

Commenting specifically on Middleton's impression upon him, Gibbon relates:

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1. Edward Gibbon, The Memoirs and Life of Edward Gibbon, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill (London: Methuen and Co., 1900), p. 67.

2. Ibid., p. 67. 3. Ibid., p. 67.

> His bold criticism, which approaches the precipice of infidelity, produced on my mind a singular effect; . . . . The elegance of style and freedom of argument were repelled by a shield of prejudice. I still revered the character, or rather the names of the saints and fathers whom Dr. Middleton exposes; nor could he destroy my implicit belief that the gift of miraculous powers was continued in the church, during the first four or five centuries of Christianity. But I was unable to resist the weight of historical evidence, that within the same period most of the leading doctrines of popery were already introduced in theory and practice: nor was my conclusion absurd, that miracles are the test of truth, and that the church must be orthodox and pure, which was so often approved by the visible interposition of the Deity.[1]

Gibbon continued for some time to believe that the doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome must be of some merit because of the marvellous things related by such revered persons as Chrysostom, Austin, and Jerome.

Reading Bossuet, he says, "I read, I applauded, I believed."[2] Later he remarked that it seemed incredible that he could ever have believed in transubstantiation, but, "Youth is sincere and impetuous; and a momentary glow of enthusiasm had raised me above all temporal considerations."[3]

Following his conversion, he was sent--or banished--by his father to Lausanne. There he lived with and was tutored by a Mr. Pavilliard, a Calvinist minister. He partly credits the Clergyman with his rescue from the Roman Church. Yet, he says of his rescue:

> I must observe, that it was principally effected by my private reflections; and I still remember my solitary transport at the discovery of a philosophical argument against the doctrine of transubstantiation: that the text of Scripture , which seems to inculcate the real presence, is attested only by a single sense--our sight; while the real presence itself is disproved by three of our senses--the sight, the touch, and the taste.[4]

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1. Ibid., p. 68. 2. Ibid., p. 69. 3. Ibid., p. 71.
4. Ibid., p. 89.

(He fails to note that David Hume had congratulated Archbishop Tillotson for having made the same discovery.)

Commenting on how his change of Communions affected his interest in doctrinal inquiries, he remarks:

> The various articles of the Romish creed disappeared like a dream; and after a full conviction, on Christmas-day, 1754, I received the sacrament in the church of Lausanne. It was here that I suspended my religious inquiries, acquiescing with implicit belief in the tenets and mysteries, which are adopted by the general consent of Catholics and Protestants.[1]

Although it is superfluous to reflect further on Middleton's influence on Gibbon's Christian experience, it is an interesting conjecture--possibly beyond investigation and admittedly beyond the scope of this thesis--how effective a Christian experience the style of a man's writing and the weight of his historical arguments, plus one's private religious reflections, produce. The doctrinal content in which Gibbon says his conversion led him to acquiesce, and his treatment of the development of Christianity in his monumental volumes of history, are perhaps adequate indications.

He alludes to Middleton again in his Decline and Fall. Examining the miracles of the Primitive Church, which he lists as the third of what he considers to be the secondary causes of the expansion of Christianity, he observes that these miracles "have been lately attacked in a very free and ingenious inquiry."[2] Although as a historian he is not obliged to give his opinion in the matter, he feels he can offer some suggestions which will help decide with some

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1. Ibid., p. 90.

2. Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed. by J. B. Bury(London: Methuen & Co., 1897), II, 29.

precision when genuine miracles ceased.

He observes that whereas latent scepticism characterizes the eighteenth-century temperament, credulity was the mark of the Early Christians; they "perpetually trod on mystic ground, and their minds were exercised by the habits of believing the most extraordinary events."[1] Their credulity suggests why the Christians of the Early Church accepted the genuine miracles:

> The real or imaginary prodigies of which they so Frequently conceived themselves to be the objects, the instruments, or the spectators, very happily disposed them to adopt, with the same ease, but with far greater justice, the authentic wonders of the evangelic history; and thus miracles that exceeded not the measure of their own experience inspired them with the most lively assurance of mysteries which were acknowledged to surpass the limits of their understanding. It is this deep impression of supernatural truths which has been so much celebrated under the name of faith, a state of mind described as the surest pledge of the divine favour and of future felicity, and recommended as the first or perhaps the only merit of a Christian.[2]

Gibbon would apparently limit genuine miracles to those of Scripture; that is, if one can believe that there ever were any genuine ones, after all that he says about what promoted a belief in them. He does not resolve why "far greater justice" disposed the first Christians to accept them. The suggestion that they were not beyond the Early Christians' experience and that credulity, as much as anything else, accounts for it reveals why Gibbon can be charged with scepticism more fairly than Middleton.

"Tom" Paine did as much as anybody to rank Middleton with the sceptics. In his Age of Reason he refers to him. Attacking the evidences of revealed religion, he argues that miracles are the most incredible evidence ever invented to obtain belief in a particular system or opinion which calls itself a religion. This kind of evidence makes the Almighty

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1. Ibid., p. 31. 2. Ibid., pp. 31 f.

appear to be a Showman, "playing tricks to amuse and make the people stare and wonder."[1]

This man whose mind is his only church[2] holds this doctrine of revelation: "The Word of God is the Creation we behold; and this word of God revealeth to man all that is necessary for man to know of his Creator."[3]

Paine says that when he had written the first part of the Age of Reason, he had not realized that anyone had subscribed to the same creed. Then he discovered Conyers Middleton, and they agree "with respect to the creation."[4] Middleton had called it a revelation and had defended it as the only necessary one, calling Cicero to his defense. This pleased Paine. He praises Middleton: "He was a man of a strong original mind; had the courage to think for himself, and the honesty to speak his thoughts."[5]

Paine read Middleton, he applauded, and he believed. The sublime sentences from his work and from Cicero's reveal two men who, though they lived ages apart, yet thought alike:

> In Cicero we see that vast superiority of mind, that sublimity of right reasoning and justness of ideas which man acquires, not by studying Bibles and Testaments, and the theology of schools built thereon, but by studying the Creator in the immensity and unchangeable order of his creation, and the immutability of his law.
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> In Middleton, we see the manly eloquence of an enlarged mind, and the genuine sentiments of a true believer in his Creator. Instead of reposing his faith on books, by whatever name they may be called, whether Old Testaments

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1. Thomas Paine, The Theological Works of Thomas Paine (London: R. Carlile, 1819), I, 48.

2. Ibid., cf. p. 4. 3. Ibid., p. 49. 4. Ibid., p. 49.

5. Ibid., p. 49.

> or New, he fixes the creation as the original standard by which every other thing called the world, or work of God, be tried . . . and the result will be that the authors of them, whoever they were, will be convicted of forgery.[1]

Middleton would hardly have welcomed Paine's applause or admitted so close an alliance. In spite of the fact that certain of his views are pliable enough for the Secptic's abuse, they are not as compatible with Paine's as supposed. The latter denies the Creed to which Middleton subscribes, and he fumbles with a method which Middleton handles acceptably.

In evaluating the contribution which Middleton made to the scepticism that either smouldered or roared in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a more valid observation than either the rationalist theologians or the admitted sceptics made is that he fanned it, but added little fuel to it.

3. The Emerging Evangelicalism

If Gibbon's measuring stick on ecclesiastical critics, which has Middleton and Cardinal Baronius at opposite extremities, were read in a slightly different way, two other recordings in the latter eighteenth-century ecclesiastical positions would be evident. One is the sceptical assaults on Christianity; the other is evangelicalism.

Like the controversy over continuing miracles, evangelicalism was a reaction against the traditional religion. The most important influences on its emergence were: the arid rationalism of the theological speculation; the consequent moral and spiritual lag in society; the attitude in the Church toward enthusiasm and mysticism;

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1. Ibid., pp. 51 f.

and social and political conditions.

Critics of the eighteenth century agree that the intellectual indulgence of the English theologians left the individual layman spiritually impoverished. A moral and spiritual vacuum formed under the intellectual crest of the Church. Stephen makes this cryptic comment on the emergence of evangelicalism:

> The true explanation is to be found in the records of the social development of the time, and in the growth of a great population outside the rusty ecclesiastical machinery. The refuse thus cast aside took fire by spontaneous combustion. The great masses of the untaught and uncared for inherited a tradition of the old theology. As they multiplied and developed, the need of some mode of satisfying the religious instincts became more pressing; and as the pure sceptics had nothing to say, and the official clergy could only say something in which they did not believe, Wesley's resuscitation of the old creed gave just the necessary impulse.[1]

To these observations should be added that which Pattison makes in examining the activity and success of the evangelicals: "Their doctrine of conversion by supernatural influence must on no account be forgotten."[2]

Near the middle of the century one man became alarmed enough over the by-products of ecclesiastical inertia and rationally defended Christianity to act. John Wesley(1703-1791) examined the vices and the virtues of English Christianity, Church life, and society with imagination and conviction. His evangelical leadership and spiritual influence proved to be wide and deep, and his energy was restless and unfailing.

Along with his concern for religious revival and his activities in promoting it, he plunged into theological controversies.

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1. Stephen, op. cit., II, 424. 2. Pattison, op. cit., p. 116.

He became interested in the discussion over continuing miracles. He entered the controversy in 1749, after he had spent a few weeks reading the Free Inquiry. He intimated that he had neither the leisure nor the inclination to answer all of Middleton's arguments, but he felt it necessary to defend the miracles of the first three centuries. So he wrote his Letter to the Reverend Dr. Conyers Middleton. His contribution to the discussion proved to be neither as proficient nor as influential as his practical work.

He states at the beginning that he disagrees with the conclusions in every section of the Free Inquiry. He cannot accept the argument for determining how long miracles had continued. He holds that the Apostolic miraculous powers had ceased in the third century, or by the beginning of the fourth. Anticipating that Middleton may ask why he does not allow them after the third century, he replies with the traditional canon, that corruptions set in after the Roman Empire had become Christian.

Wesley's criticisms are of the common-sense variety. He uses the argument from consequences as one of his most repeated rebuttals. He remarks that Middleton is attempting to free people, even Englishmen, from believing the superstition called Christianity. He contends that the criticisms of the Fathers damage the characters of the Apostles. In addition to his remarks in the Letter, he elsewhere accuses Middleton of aiming his blows "at the fanatics who wrote the Bible,"[1] and of attempting to overthrow Christianity.[2]

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1. John Wesley, The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley, ed. by Ernest Rhys (Everyman's Library; London: J. M. Dent and Company) [no date given], III, 448.

2. Ibid., II, cf. p. 92.

As with Middleton's other critics, the criticism of style is one of Wesley's chief rebuttals. He believes that if Middleton achieves any success, it is more because of the mechanics of his presentation than the truth of his reasoning. He accuses him of "uncommon artfulness and disingenuity"[1] in his arguments, and he contends repeatedly that Middleton offers assertions, not proofs. He believes that he argues more weakly as he proceeds through the Free Inquiry.

"The farther you go," he addresses Middleton, "the more things you imagine (and only imagine) yourself to have proved. Consequently, as you gather up more mistakes every step you take, every page is more precarious than the former."[2]

Middleton's translations of the Fathers' words come under fire. Noting the contrast with his own, Wesley writes:

> The strength of your argument constantly lies in a loose and paraphrastical manner of translating. The strength of mine lies in translating all in the most close and literal manner; so that closeness of translation strengthens mine, in the same proportion as it weakens your arguments.[3]

Whereas Gibbon and Paine delight in Middleton's style, Wesley finds fault with it:

> Dr. Middleton's style wants easiness; It is stiff to a high degree. And stiffness in writing is full as great a fault as stiffness in behaviour . . . . He is pedantic; . . . . His style is abundantly artificial. . . . his art glares in every sentence. He continually says, "Observe how fine I speak:" Whereas, a good speaker seems to forget he speaks at all.[4]

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1. John Wesley, The Works of the Reverend John Wesley (3d ed.; London: John Mason, 1829-30), X, cf. p. 15.

2. Ibid., p. 24. 3. Ibid., p. 52. 4. Ibid., XIII, 378 f.

He rejects Middleton's point on the silence of the testimony among the Apostolic Fathers. He holds that their pages are full of references to extraordinary gifts. He glosses over the earliest Christian literature, remarking that the earliest Fathers make numerous allusions to them. Disregarding the fact that Middleton had limited his argument from silence to the literature of the first four or five decades after the deaths of the Apostles, Wesley extends the application to the Apologists of the first three centuries, and then exclaims:

> O Sir, mention this no more. I intreat you, never name their silence again. They speak loud enough to shame you as long as you live. You cannot therefore talk with any grace of the "pretended revival of them, after a cessation of forty or fifty years;" or draw conclusions from that which never was.[1]

He has another criticism of Middleton's argument on the silence of testimony. He holds that it is irrational to postulate what was not done on the basis of what is not recorded; reason cannot explore that kind of conclusion. Then he replies with an argument which is even farther out of the reach of examination than he supposes Middleton's position to be:

> For there may be many reasons in the depth of the wisdom of God, for his doing many things at various times and places, either by his natural or supernatural power, which were never recorded at all. And abundantly more were recorded once, and that with the fullest evidence, whereof, nevertheless, we find no certain evidence now, at the distance of fourteen hundred years.[2]

The reply to Middleton's criticism that the Fathers have obscure Christians and women and boys performing the miracles is: "Sir, you talk in your sleep: You could never talk thus, if you had your

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1. Ibid., X, 23. 2. Ibid., p. 55.

eyes open, and your understanding about you."[1] When Middleton says that he can draw nothing from these testimonies because of the persons supposedly endowed with the powers, Wesley puns:

> Permit me, Sir, to apply to you what was spoken on another occasion: "Sir, the well is deep, and thou hast nothing to draw with;" neither sufficient skill, nor industry and application. Besides, you are resolved to draw out of the well what was never in it, and must, of course, lose all your labour.[2]

Rebuttal in the same vein as the above follows in the replies to Middleton's arguments on the characters of the Fathers and his examination of the individual miraculous gifts. The discussion on Justin and the judgment on his self-deception about his powers prompt Wesley's retort, "Now you clap your wings."[3] He holds that Justin's doctrine of the millenium is no more nor no less than what the Bible teaches. He charges that Middleton has no scruples about attacking the Fathers and making their writings look like dunghills; and that he invents the characters of the Fathers so that they can act as his tenth legion in fighting his battles, and he tosses them about with the skill of a vagrant juggler. The drift of his arguments against miraculous cures is obvious: "It points at the Master, as well as his servants; and tends to prove that, after all this talk about miraculous cures, we are not sure there were ever any in the world."[4] The criticism of the power to cast out devils undermines the reality of the Apostles ever possessing it.

Although he had planned to go no farther into the ecclesiastical miracles than the third century, Wesley decides to look at the remarks

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1. Ibid., p. 27. 2. Ibid., p. 29. 3. Ibid., p. 30
4. Ibid., pp. 40 f.

on the North African Christians who had regained the ability to speak after Hunneric had cut out their tongues. Like the other critics, he cannot see how Middleton finds any connection between this instance and the stories related in the Paris medical files. Nor can he understand how Middleton can accept that evidence; it is remarkable that "a man who is too wise to believe the Bible, should believe everything but the Bible."[1]

Noting Middleton's remarks that one who would defend the miracles of the Fathers disgraces the Protestant Religion, and must be motivated by the hope of ecclesiastical preferment, Wesley says:

> Even such an one as I have faintly attempted this [defending the Fathers' testimony], although I neither have, nor expect to have, any preferment, not even to be a Lambeth Chaplain; which if Dr. Middleton is not, it is not his own fault.[2]

He concludes his letter by declaring that the Fathers were genuine Christians; they displayed the virtues of holiness and happiness, which are indications that the image of God is impressed upon a person, and that he is a Christian. He laments the fact that there are so many nominal Christians in his day, and he prays in Middleton's behalf, "that the God of power and love may make both them, and you, and me, such Christians as those Fathers were."[3]

Wesley indulges in scientific scholarship less often than Middleton's other critics. In fact, his reply is as ineffective as any offered. It is of little more than literary interest. He is unwilling to admit the validity of Middleton's plane of investigation and to

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1. Ibid., p. 59. 2. Ibid., p. 59. 3. Ibid., p. 79.

approach him on that plane. He meets what he interprets as scepticism with common sense, over-indulgent rationalism, or emotionalism. A snap judgment of Middleton's character too often suffices for an evaluation of the content of an argument. Insisting on faith as the grounds of certainty, Wesley places evidence on a plane where it is scientifically unexaminable. In summary, his indifference to historical criticism and his inattentiveness to philosophical argument sterilize and antiquate his reply.

His contribution to the controversy over continuing miracles is symptomatic of the intellectual weaknesses in evangelicalism at the time he gave it its initial impulses. Stephen makes this comment on the intellectual sterility which is often characteristic of such movements:

> They flourish for a time because they satisfy a real emotional craving; but they have within them the seeds of decay. A form of faith which has no charms for thinkers ends by repelling from itself even the thinkers who have grown up under its influence. In the second generation the abler disciples [of Wesley] revolted against the strict dogmatism of their fathers, and sought for some more liberal form of creed, or some more potent intellectual narcotic. The belief generated in the lower or middle social strata was utterly uncongenial to the higher currents of thought, and, thus confined within narrow limits, ossified into a set of barren theories, never vivified by contact with genuine thought.[1]

Wesley's indifference to the higher currents of thought and his hasty dismissal of such theological controversies as the examination of the historical evidences of Christianity help explain the survival of the practical fruits of eighteenth-century evangelicalism. Abbey and Overton suggest why Wesley's followers had considerable success

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1. Stephen, op. cit., II, 341.

in capturing the masses. They distinguished themselves by:

> . . . their disinterestedness, their moral courage in braving obloquy and unpopularity, their purity of life, the spirituality of their teaching, and the world of practical good they did among a neglected people.[1]

If Stephen is correct, that "thought generally progresses by antagonism,"[2] then the lack of irritation helps explain the stagnation which is evident in the theological speculation in England during the second half of the eighteenth century. The nature of the subjects which the majority of the theologians were discussing did not arouse antagonism, and that which was offered was superficially dismissed.

Even Middleton's and Hume's writings failed to advance creative thought after the middle of the century. Their critics either mistook the tools they offered, found them unusable, or abused them. They could not see how the road that Middleton's arguments opened up could have any other destination than to lead where Hume's obviously led, to scepticism. When the challenge of an objective and disinterested inquiry into historical evidence came along, as Pattison remarks, "The English writers of the period had neither the taste nor the knowledge for it . Gibbon alone approached the true difficulties, but met only with opponents, 'victory over whom was a sufficient humiliation.'"[3]

The antagonism which Middleton offered theological discussion in the eighteenth century exposed these facts: that rationalism assists theological investigation as long as it compromises on its limitations and disentangles itself from groundless opinion

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1. Abbey and Overton, op. cit., p. 402.

2. Stephen, op. cit., II, 341. 3. Pattison, op. cit., p. 50.

and obsolete prepossessions, but that it becomes burdensome when it fails to acknowledge the validity and accept the results of empirical investigation; that, though a challenge to traditionalism is sometimes prematurely analyzed as scepticism, and though scepticism has at times threatened Christianity, historically the result has been a defense which has checked the threat; and that religious revival has emerged when stagnant speculation has left the heart lagging, and, as evidenced by the evangelical movement in England in the eighteenth century, revival cannot be creatively and enduringly effective unless the theology which emerges has intellectual content and unless a rational effort is put forth to regulate the emotional impact of the religious experiences which result.

CHAPTER VIII

CRITICISM AND BELIEF

1. Historical Investigation before the Middle of the Eighteenth Century
2. Middleton's Contributions to the Development of Historical Criticism
   (1.) An Unwillingness To Accept the Traditional Evidence for Continuing Miracles
   (2.) An Unwillingness To Concede that Criticism Is Destructive
   (3.) A Scientific Criticism of the Scriptures

The following passage from Frederic W. Farrar on the unshackling of the Bible from the clutches of orthodox dogmatism alludes to the impediments which the eighteenth-century English rationalists were putting in the way of the development of scientific Biblical exposition, and to the unpopularity and rarity of deliverers like Middleton:

> . . . the deliverance came, as it always comes, not from majorities, but from the few; not from multitudes, but from individuals; not from the favourites of erring Churches, but from rebels against their formalism and their tyranny; not from the smooth adherents of conventional religionism; but from its inspired martyrs and heroic revolutionists. In other words, the deliverance comes always from the prophets and the children of the prophets: . . . . And so it came to the "ghastly smooth life, dead at the heart" of this age of disputatious dogma and loveless religionism. And so it always will come. It will come, not always from men whom Churches bless, but from those whom they anathematise: not only from those whom churchmen praise, but from those whom they call Beelzebub. . . . [1]

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1. Frederic W. Farrar, History of Interpretation(London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 378.

Middleton rebelled against the English theologians' uncritical acceptance of the historical records of Christianity. He advocated the removal of the hypothetical wrappings which were obscuring obvious facts, and the exposition of the Christian documents to a scientific examination.

His proposals, along with his attacks on the literature of the Early Church and on the witnesses of what had been generally accepted as reliably attested facts, heralded the development of scientific historical criticism.

This closing chapter of the thesis will survey this development and evaluate Middleton's place in it.

1. Historical Investigation before the Middle of the Eighteenth Century

Although the historical sense did not mature till the nineteenth century, its conception and rudimentary application to the history of Christianity began to take place in the previous one. Even the late seventeenth century had observed the awakening of a critical interest in history.

One development which had encouraged it was the progress of scientific discoveries. The new interest in science inevitably influenced theology. Farrar comments:

> The students of science have exercised a mighty influence over theology, were it only that by their linear progress and achievements they have stimulated that spirit of inquiry which for many centuries had only gyrated within limits prescribed too often by the ignorance of priests.[1]

As he goes on to note, the discoveries in physical science were affecting philosophy, and so, he asks, "Was it likely that criticism

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1. Ibid., pp. 426.

should remain stationary?"[1]

One person in the seventeenth century who encouraged a critical attitude toward Biblical history was the philosopher, Spinoza (1632-1677). He criticized the Pentateuch, anticipating the views and influencing the writings of several later critics.

Even before Spinoza, a Dutchman named Ludoficus Capellus (1585-1658) was engaged in research which entitled him to be considered the first textual critic of the Old Testament. In his Critica Sacra he compared the Masoretic text with other authorities, Greek and Rabbinic writings, Jewish and Samaritan manuscripts, and the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament. He noted that the scribes had made several mistakes in the Masoretic text. As a result of his work, "No reasonable man," Farrar says, "could doubt that the Jewish notion of a correspondence of the Holy Books with the supposed autographs of Moses or Ezra down to the very apices of the letters, was a preposterous fiction."[2]

At the close of the seventeenth century, in 1697, an important work of literary criticism, Richard Bentley's Dissertation on Phalaris, appeared. Two years later he expanded this volume. In these and shorter dissertations he exposed the fact that numerous forgeries and spurious writings exist in ancient literature. Examinations like Bentley's, Farrar observes, "awoke the minds of men to the fact that pseudepigraphy was a common phenomenon alike of Jewish and Christian literature, and showed them the decisive character of internal evidence."[3]

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1. Ibid., p. 428. 2. Ibid., p. 387. 3. Ibid., pp. 428 f.

A critic who bid as much as anybody to establish this fact was the French oratorian, Richard Simon, who in a series of scholarly treatises published between 1678-95 offered his literary analysis of Scripture. Working with Spinoza's principles of interpretation, he proceeded to investigate the Old and New Testaments as one would investigate any other historical records. Aiming at studying the Bible objectively, he nevertheless accepted the infallibility of the truths contained, and he considered that the alterations of the text, which are due to the human element involved in its transmission, are of as much authority as the text itself.

The development of criticism in England in the eighteenth century received only faint impulses from these writings. Middleton is the first thoroughgoing advocate of the historical method, and while he acknowledges a certain indebtedness to Spinoza's principles, he does not single out the particular persons or influences that led him to see the importance of the historical environment to a correct interpretation of the historical records of Christianity. It was certainly not the deistic or rationalistic interpreters who had been dominating the theological discussions.

Commenting on the progress of criticism in the eighteenth century, Herbert Brook Workman, in The History of Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge, sums up the situation when Middleton's works appeared:

> Some slight beginnings it is true were made in the examination of the Pentateuch, but so slight that we may say that Higher Criticism was as undreamed of by the rationalist as traditionalism was unquestioned by the orthodox. The modern difficulty of the exact place in religion and theology

> of the Bible finds no place in the life of the Churches in the eighteenth century; for the majority of protestants the Bible was still their religion. All criticism of antiquity had disappeared from the universities. . . . The historical sense was equally lacking. The eighteenth century produced indeed vast collections of documents-- the Rymers and the rest--for which to-day we are grateful, but the critical study of history was still to come. The story of the world before the emergence of Greece and Rome, let alone before Abraham, was a matter undreamed of. Moses was still regarded as the first historian; sober theologians could still point to shells on hill-tops as proofs of the Flood; of the discredit that anthropology has given to the early Bible record there was not a suspicion.[1]

2. Middleton's Contributions to the Development of the Historical Method

Middleton, more than any other English theologian who wrote before the middle of the eighteenth century--with the possible exception of Richard Bentley--awoke to the value and necessity of a critical approach to historical data. His writings contain at least three emphases which followed in line with the development of the historical method.

(1.) An Unwillingness To Accept the Traditional Evidence for Continuing Miracles

His first emphasis which called for the application of historical criticism has already been dealt with in the discussion on the proper method of determining the reality of continuing miracles: an unwillingness to accept the traditional evidence.

His argument in the Preface of the Free Inquiry, as has been noticed, insists that the reality of continuing miracles is determined by weighing the credibility of the facts and of the witnesses who contribute the testimony. This argument departs from

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1. Herbert Brook Workman, "The Eighteenth Century, " The History of Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge, a Collective Work(Glasgow: Blackie and Son, Ltd., 1929), Part V, Chapter 3, 688 f.

the traditional position.

Not only would he not accept the traditional testimony unconditionally, but he was anxious to apply to it the critical criteria which reason and experience find to be reliable tools for impartial inquiry.

As already shown, his suspicions of the historical testimony were not shared by his contemporaries, who accepted it uncritically, but at the same time felt it necessary to suggest rational reasons why miracles had continued for some time in the Church.

He was also unwilling to accept the premise, acceptable and serviceable to orthodox dogmatism, that the reputation of a witness guarantees credible testimony.

He criticized the blindness of certain traditional theologians who were, in effect, denying that certain witnesses were subject to human weaknesses. Let us face the facts which experience discovers, he invites. His position is best explained in a treatise in which he examines the variations found among the Gospel writers:

> Wherefore, as we learn from daily experience that prejudice, passion, want of memory, knowledge or judgment naturally produce obscurity, inaccuracy and mistakes in all modern writings whatsoever; so when we see the same effects in ancient writings, how sacred soever they may be deemed, we must necessarily impute them to the same causes. That is what sense and reason prescribe, and what will be found at last the onely [sic] way of solving all difficulties.[1]

In the Inquiry he makes a similar statement. It occurs in section five, when he deals with the objections to his Introductory Discourse. Noticing the objection that he threatens the credit of history, he argues thus for the validity of the historical method in assessing the worthiness of a witness:

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 375.

> . . . [history teaches] that human nature has always been the same; agitated by the same appetites and passions, and liable to the same excesses and abuses of them, in all ages and countries of the world; so that our experience of what passes in the present age, will be the best comment on what is delivered to us concerning the past.[1]

Middleton's insight into the continuity of history, as evidenced in the preceding quotation, affected his evaluation of historical testimony. He realized that human emotional behavior has not changed appreciably. He was also saying that the period of history covered in the Bible, though it be distinguished from what followed by a unique supernatural surveillance, is still open to criticism.

Besides these insights, another point at which he improved upon the traditional approach to continuing miracles was over whether the evidence for a miracle is in the same category as that for other historical facts. He insisted that because it is extraordinary, and because subjective factors often influence the interpretation of the evidence, it must be evaluated more critically.

His position can hardly be disputed. As pointed out in the third chapter[2], C. S. Lewis agrees with it. F. R. Tennant does also, and, in addition, he puts restrictions on how much weight philosophical considerations have in validating the testimony. He says, "All discussion of the antecedent probability of a miracle is futile."[3]

Middleton went along with the traditional evaluation of the evidence for the miracles of Scripture. He accepted them partly because of philosophical considerations and partly because of the testimony. He considered them valid because of the circumstances surrounding the facts and the witnesses. He could not feel the same way about the later miracles.

It is interesting to note that in the development of criticism,

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1. Ibid., I, 364. 2. Cf. pp. 67 f. 3. Tennant, op. cit., p. 89.

the same reasons that he gave for not accepting the testimony of the Fathers are given for questioning the miracles of Scripture. Tennant observes that, in the case of the Gospel miracles, the original testimony to what was formerly accepted as bare facts is now discovered to be "shot through with hypothetic interpretation, which can no longer be accepted on authority as final, or on its own merits as either self-consistent or necessary."[1] He puts forth that, as a result of the progress of criticism, the Gospel miracles can be explained as immediate and natural phenomena.

A more charitable evaluation of how the development of criticism has affected the reliability of the traditional evidences is offered by John Knox. He cautions against identifying the work of Jesus as the Christ and His historical career. No higher criticism can invalidate the former, though it may demonstrate that certain things were not said or done during the latter. The question of whether the miracles are historical facts must be answered, not only in the light of the evidence which the testimony offers, but also in the light of the meaning they had for the Church:

> . . . to understand the New Testament(whether one is a historian or a preacher) is to understand the event, and the event occurred within the life of the primitive church, whose experience is integrally a part of it. Just as the very reality of light includes the experience of seeing it, so the reality of the event is not a bare, hypothetical, unknowable "something" which antedates and is independent of the responses it evoked in human senses, minds, and hearts, but includes these responses as an essential part of itself. No incident merely as such belongs to the event--rather the incident as experienced and interpreted. Therefore the important question about these miracles stories, as about all other stories in the gospels, is: Why were they believed, remembered, loved, and used?[2]

These statements from recent critics are an indication, then, that the development of criticism has taken place

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1. Ibid., p. 95. 2. Knox, op. cit., p. 113.

along avenues for which Middleton offered a blueprint in the eighteenth century. As he pointed out, the evidence which historical testimony gives to a miracle must be critically and empirically evaluated, and it is not the only consideration. By itself, it does not amount to a proof; it is only a part of the evidence. Extraordinary events require extraordinary evidence. A miracle--admitting its possibility--must be judged by its intrinsic purpose, as well as by its historical meaning, and not solely by its testimony.

Historical criticism has developed because objective thinkers were willing to adopt such principles as these, and apply them.

(2.) An Unwillingness To Concede That Criticism Is Destructive

Middleton's second principle which has been of aid in the development of criticism was an unwillingness to concede that criticism is destructive. This point is made clear most effectively in his treatment of the objections to his Introductory Discourse.

The first objection which he notices is:

> It is objected, that by the character, which I have given of the antient [sic] Fathers, the authority of the books of the New Testament, which are transmitted to us through their hands, will be rendered precarious and uncertain.[1]

This objection, which has been referred to earlier in the thesis,[2] summarizes the high regard of the orthodox eighteenth-century theologians for the all but infallible authority of the Fathers.

Middleton's first reaction is that the point is trifling and groundless. The authority of the New Testament books does not depend on the witness of the Fathers or of any one select group, but "on the

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 231. 2. Cf. pp. 234 f.

general credit and reception which they found, not onely [sic] in all the Churches, but with all the private Christians of those ages, who were able to purchase copies of them."[1] The books were distributed and preserved and handed down from one age to another, much as the Greek and Roman literary works were. Any maligning of the sacred writings could reach only a few copies; several manuscripts would be preserved unaffected.

A further partly rational, partly historical, observation is this:

> . . . there were some circumstances peculiar to the books of the New Testament which insured the preservation of them more effectually, than of any other antient [sic] books whatsoever; the divinity of their character; and the religious regard, which was paid to them by all the sects and parties of Christians; and above all, the mutual jealousies of those very parties, which were perpetually watching over each other, lest any of them should corrupt the sources of that pure doctrine, which they all professed to teach and to deduce from the same books.[2]

Many private Christians would have copies of the Scriptures; so spurious editions could not gain acceptance.

Finally, he remarks that even though the authority of the New Testament were at stake, one cannot deny the facts with regard to the Fathers' characters; if the facts cast suspicion on the testimony, the facts must be admitted, no matter what the consequences may be.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, he was justified in criticizing those who were giving the Fathers too much credit in the matter of settling the canon of Scripture. They are not as important in deciding this issue as the eighteenth-century divines supposed. There are several reasons for minimizing their importance. As Farrar

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 321. 2. Ibid., p. 323.

points out, their doctrine of Scripture is not reliable. They regarded the Old Testament, not as the history of an imcomplete revelation modified by the New Covenant, but "as a supernatural and homogeneous document of equal authority with the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists."[1] Few of the Fathers could read the Old Testament in the original language. The deficiencies of the ages in which they lived resulted in errors and inaccuracies in their understanding of the text. Farrar says he would be unwilling to speak disrespectfully of the Fathers—as he believes Middleton does—but one must recognize these facts: "They were hampered by the conditions, influenced by the culture, swayed by the prejudices of the times in which they lived."[2] He makes this reasonable conclusion:

> We say of them, with St. Chrysostom, "Oh blessed and happy men whose names are in the Book of Life." We cannot elevate them into idols, or accept their utterances as oracles; but we look unto them with love and reverence, as to our elder brothers in the great family of God.[3]

Few theologians today would contend that Middleton's frank criticisms of the Fathers damage the authority of the New Testament. Apostolicity, rather than the testimony of the Fathers, is the recognized criterion of the canon. Herbert H. Farmer remarks:

> . . . it was right instinct which led the church in course of time to formulate the principle that from among the writings which the general mind of the community had already, by the unconscious selection of use, declared to be valuable and worth preserving, only those should be finally admitted to the canon which were apostolic in origin, for as we have seen, the apostles do stand apart: they are within the circle of the divine revelation in Christ, within the process of the Incarnation itself, and any testimony of theirs shares in the same distinctive status. . . . the judgment seems warranted that if we do not identify apostolic origin with direct apostolic authorship, and if we frankly allow for

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1. Farrar, op. cit., p. 164. 2. Ibid., p. 163. 3. Ibid., p. 242.

> legitimate doubt in respect of some of the writings included in our New Testament(e.f., II Peter, James, Jude, Revelation), the church on the whole decided well.[1]

Another objection raised against Middleton's Introductory Discourse gave him an opportunity again to express his unwillingness to concede that criticism is necessarily destructive. The objection, dealt with earlier[2], is that to reject the unanimous testimony of the Fathers on miracles is to destroy a trust in history.

Middleton replies to the objection, first by observing what history teaches on the rejection of certain authorities. They have been rejected before, and the immediate cry has been the criticism made of him. Civil authority offers an example. The first Christians rejected the state religion and criticized the heathen for relying on the beliefs and opinions of their rulers. But when the authorities became Christian, the Church changed its mind about how important the beliefs of civil rulers are. Another example is the change in attitude toward ecclesiastical authority. By rejecting its supremacy, the Reformers overcame the superstitions of Popery. Thus, the history and experience of the Church itself are an objection to the opinion that criticizing the Fathers destroys the faith and credit of history.

Middleton urges that the Doctors Berriman and Chapman, who had advanced the objection, are making an obvious mistake. They forget what he has insisted upon before, that more is expected of those who give testimony on miracles than of those who

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1. Herbert H. Farmer, "The Bible: Its Significance and Authority," Vol. I, The Interpreter's Bible, ed. by George Arthur Buttrick, et. al. (12 vols.; Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), p. 23.

2. Cf. pp. 206 f., and 260 f.

give testimony on common events:

> Ordinary facts, related by a credible person, furnish no cause of doubting from the nature of the thing: but if they be strange and extraordinary, doubts naturally arise, and in proportion as they approach towards the marvellous, these doubts still increase and grow stronger; for mere honesty will not warrant them; we require other qualities in the Historian; a degree of knowledge, experience, and discernment, sufficient to judge of the whole nature and circumstances of the case: and if any of these be wanting, we necessarily suspend our belief.[1]

A weak man may record marvellous things, he continues, but his credulity is immediately in question, and the fact that he has been imposed upon is usually obvious. If a man of recognized abilities and acceptable judgment record miraculous happenings or attempt to perform miracles, suspicion is immediately aroused, especially if he is promoting a cause in which self-interest could be involved, or if he is endorsing a favorite opinion. The reason for suspecting him is that "a pretension to miracles, has in all ages and nations, been found the most effectual instrument of Impostors, towards deluding the multitude, and gaining their ends upon them."[2]

He does not qualify the above statements. He apparently does not conceive of their being applied against the genuine miracles.

He next refers to several writers of antiquity whose wonders have been rejected without destroying a belief in the more common facts they record. For example, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (430?-367 B.C.) is recognized as a faithful and accurate historian. He relates the appearance of the gods, Castor and Pollux, on white horses to spur the Romans on to an important victory. The miracle

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, pp. 350 f.

2. Ibid., p. 351.

is no longer believed, but Dionysius's facts on the battle and the victory are accepted. Or again, in the case of Polycarp's martyrdom, the facts connected with it are not doubted, but one pauses at the miracles.

He interjects the observation that the case of witchcraft fits in with the argument he is advancing:

> The incredibility of the thing prevailed, and was found at last too strong for all this force of human testimony: so that the belief of witches is now utterly extinct, and quietly buried without involving history in its ruin, or leaving even the least disgrace or censure upon it.[1]

He pauses on two more recent records. The first deals with the miracles performed at the tomb of a deceased Abbé of Paris. He was a Jansenist who died in 1725 and whose body was buried at the Church of St. Medard in Paris. As reports of his sanctity spread, crowds flocked to his tomb and worshipped him. Miracles began to happen. Since the Government had taken action against Jansenism, it tried to check the enthusiasm over the miracles by putting a wall around the tomb. But the fame of the wonders spread. Various records of them were published. A Monsieur de Montgeron, who attributed his conversion to Christianity to the wonders that happened in the Churchyard, published a collection of them in a work which he presented personally to the King. Several other collections were published, in which were included sworn affidavits, statements, and authentic vouchers by those who claimed to have been eye-witnesses and recipients of miraculous benefits.

Middleton challenges those who rail at him for jeopardizing the faith of history to produce any evidence for the Primitive-Church

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1. Ibid., p. 357.

miracles which is half as strong as for the miracles of the Abbé of Paris. If they cannot produce it, then their only alternatives are either to accept both the older and the more modern miracles or to reject both. He insists that if the objection against him is valid, then rejecting the recent miracles on the basis of the testimonial evidence hurts the credit of history more than his rejecting those of the Early Church.

A second more recent record which is examined is that of a Monsieur de Vertot. This historian is gullible about the sacred vial, the Sainte Ampoulle. It was used to anoint the French monarchs during the coronation ceremony. Supposedly brought from heaven by a dove for use in the coronation of the first Christian king of France, Clovis(465?-511), and then dropped into the hands of St. Remigius, Bishop of Rheims, the vial proved its supernatural descent by suddenly producing oil at the time of a coronation, and then the oil just as suddenly disappeared after the service. Although de Vertot argues that testimony from the fifth century onward--from the time the miracle happened--attests it, Middleton insists that it is in the same class as other forgeries and frauds, such as the Palladium of Troy, the Ancilia of old Rome, and the cross which Constantine supposedly saw.

He then asks if one would reject the facts in de Vertot's histories of nations, because he injects such superstitions as the Sainte Ampoulle. A man of sense realizes that a historian illustrates the truth of facts according to the style he uses, according to the ability he has, and according to the nature of his material.

A sensible person also realizes that certain other pressures prompt a man to record miracles; "The prejudices of education, a superstitious turn of mind, the interests of party, or the views of ambition, are apt to operate on a defender of those miracles, which the government and religion of his country are engaged to support."[1]

This observation, plus another which the history of miracles teaches, is the most valuable which Middleton offers in his reply to the objection that his criticism of the Primitive-Churchmen's testimonies threatens the credit of history. History teaches, he continues, that promoters of miracles prey on the weaknesses of human nature. Just as pretentious miracles are put forth by modern sects of Christians, so they were put forth in the Early Church. The success of the more recent ones can be easily accounted for: "The artifices and craft of a few, playing upon the credulity, the superstition, and the enthusiasm of the many, for the sake of some private interest."[2] When one realizes that persons who claim to perform miracles in modern times act from ulterior motives, he does not hesitate to account for the Primitive ones by a similar explanation. They were the results of fraud and imposture.

Hume made a smiliar statement. Discussing the miracles of the Abbé of Paris and other recent prodigies, he comments, "The knavery and folly of men are such common phenomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature."[3]

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1. Ibid., p. 363. 2. Ibid., p. 365.

3. Hume, op. cit., IV, 148.

He also makes this observation:

> As the violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles than in that concerning any other matter-of-fact; this must diminish very much the authority of the former testimony, and make us form a general resolution never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretence it may be covered.[1]

The two lessons, then, that Middleton learns from the testimony on the more recent miracles are: first, that one should suspend assent, even though the person giving the testimony reliably records historical facts; and second, that absurdities are easily passed off on superstitious people.

Concluding his reply to the objection that his criticisms of the Fathers damage a trust in historical testimony, he points out that a submission to the voice of authority may support a so-called faith in history, but it would in many cases lead to error and propagate distortions. On the other hand, a critical evaluation of any historical evidence, discriminating between ordinary and extraordinary events and submitting to the evidence according to the degree to which it is credible, does credit to history. This approach is the only way "to purge history from its dross, and render it beneficial to us; and by a right use of our reason and judgment, to raise our minds above the low prejudices, and childish superstitions, of the credulous vulgar."[2]

Middleton's critics saw nothing in his defense which adequately answered the objection. Dealing with the observation that discriminating historians have sometimes rejected miracles that are credible, Dodwell believes that the decision to do so was morally, rather than rationally, inspired: "The Difference of yielding or withholding

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1. Ibid., p. 148.

2. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, I, 366.

their Assent in these Cases, lies in themselves not in others; in the State of their Consciences, not in the Nature of their Argument."[1] A concern about their eternal destiny prompted the Church Fathers to record facts faithfully:

> Unless therefore the primitive Writers can be supposed to ruin themselves both here and hereafter, they must be confessed sincere in their Attestation of miraculous Powers, and it must be owned that they in Earnest believed these Things themselves.[2]

Middleton grants that the Fathers probably sincerely believed the things they attest. The task yet remains to examine the truth of the things they sincerely believed. Dodwell admits the necessity of the task, but trying to get at the motive which prompted historians to accept or reject miracles which he considers authentic, he contributes nothing constructive to it.

The principal weakness of this particular objection to Middleton's stand is the presupposition upon which it is based, namely, that the Primitive miracles are established on invincible testimony. The rationalistic efforts which Dodwell and others put forth to support this position make it clear why Gibbon found the replies to Middleton dull, and no match for the weight of the historical evidence against the Primitive testimony.

Middleton's position withstands the objections raised. The rejection of the testimony on the miracles of the Early Church and the just discrimination against the fictional element in it in no way damage the Scriptures or the credit of historical testimony. On the contrary, as Middleton had argued, objective criticism purges both.

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1. W. Dodwell, A Free Answer, p. 129. 2. Ibid., p. 136.

(3.) A Scientific Criticism of the Scriptures

A third contribution which the eighteenth-century discussion of miracles made to the evolution of historical criticism resulted from Middleton's extending the critical examination of the Christian documents farther back into the history of the Church than the traditional theologians had been desirous of extending it. He advocated a critical examination, not only of Church History, but also of the Scriptures.

As pointed out earlier in the chapter, he was a pioneer in this respect, but not the first to encourage a scientific treatment of the sacred writings. Spinoza's work has been noticed. The theological controversies also influenced the development. Pattison comments, "The deistical movement, too, of the eighteenth century, which denied any value to the Christian records on a priori and inappropriate grounds, forced upon Theology the task of determining the true character of its own historical monuments."[1] Middleton accepted the task, and thereby facilitated the conception of Biblical criticism.

Although he alludes to the criticism of the Scriptures in his discussion on miracles, he concentrates on it in other essays and letters, many of them posthumous. He is especially critical of the literal approach to the Bible, and he objects to the doctrine of verbal inspiration.

His views in a work which was published while he was still living have already been referred to.[2] They are in his Letter to Dr. Waterland(1731), in which he evaluates the work which Waterland

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1. Pattison, op. cit., pp. 225 f. 2. Cf. pp. 40 f.

had written as an attack on Tindal's Christianity As Old As the Creation. Over a period of two years he published three subsequent tracts, defending his position and replying to various remarks and objections to it.

The essence of his views is in his first publication. Here he charges Waterland with damaging the Bible by his strictly literal interpretations. This kind of Biblical study often confuses the meaning of the passage. He criticizes him for maneuvering artificially in order to make reason out of such incidents as Moses's training in the knowledge of the Egyptians, the institution of circumcision, and the building of the tower of Babel. An allegorical interpretation is to be favored when a literal one involves difficulties. It is not necessary to make everything in Scripture reasonable in order to vindicate the Christian Revelation. Universal consent that revelation is necessary is enough to render untenable Tindal's proposition that reason by itself is able to discover what Christianity discloses. Further,the historical acceptance of Christianity proves that the system is true.[1]

In publications subsequent to his Letter to Dr. Waterland, Middleton maintains that the Scriptures are not universally inspired. He attacks the Fall, and he again attacks Moses and the incident of the tower of Babel. Still, he insists that he is a Christian, and so must hold to a general belief in the divine origin and inspiration

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, III, cf. p. 52. It is in connection with this argument that he makes the point, mentioned earlier, that because Christianity is anciently derived, and because it is established as the religion of England, any attempt to prove it an imposture or any effort to overthrow it would be both criminal and immoral.

of the Bible, but not to the dogma of plenary inspiration:

> But as 'tis necessary to believe of the Scriptures in general, that they are divinely inspired; so 'tis as necessary, from the evidence of plain facts and declarations in those very Scriptures, to allow some exception to the general rule; not to insist, as some do, that every word, sentence, narration, history; or indeed every Book, we call canonical, was dictated by God.[1]

In his posthumous essay, Reflections on the Variations, or Inconsistencies Which Are Found among the Four Evangelists in Their Different Accounts of the Same Facts, Middleton again attempted to exhibit the value of the scientific approach to the Bible. One of his stated purposes in this tract is to expose the shortcomings in the apologetics of certain contemporary divines. It will be recalled that the orthodox had presented the Resurrection of Jesus as their principal defense against the deists' attacks on the Gospel miracles. They had tried to harmonize the Scriptural accounts of the Resurrection, feeling that by so doing they had presented a strong argument for the integrity of the Gospel writers and for the certainty of the recorded facts, and consequently for the reasonableness of Christianity.

Middleton makes an effort at harmonization also, using Luke's and Matthew's genealogies of Jesus. He at the same time examines others' efforts. Failing to do what others have also failed to do, he concludes that all similar efforts must end as his:

> Upon the whole, since men of the greatest learning and experience in these studies, have not been able to produce any thing satisfactory on the subject of these Genealogies, but have constantly exploded each other's notions, so that what one had established as a foundation, was presently overthrown by another, there seems to be no other part left to us, than, with many of the same Critics, to consider the two pedigrees as inexplicable and irreconcilable,

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1. Ibid., II, 234.

> and, according to the advice of St. Paul, to give no heed to endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith.[1]

He candidly asserts that the differences among the Gospel writers are numerous and obvious, and he stresses that one should account for them in a reasonable and natural manner. Instead of forcing a harmony in the facts, the most satisfactory solution is to admit the inconsistencies and let common sense account for them. The variations among the Evangelists, "like to those of all other Authors, were owing to want of accuracy in recording circumstances of little moment, or to slips of memory, or to different information."[2] This position does no offense to the Gospel, and, in fact, makes it more tenable. Commentators do more harm than good when they attempt to reconcile the differences in the Gospel narratives and make the Apostles "mere organs or pipes, through which God thought fit to convey the knowledge of certain extraordinary facts and divine truths to the world."[3] The attempts of certain divines to establish the dogma of plenary inspiration by citing the testimony of the inspired persons that they were inspired show "to what contemptible shifts the most plausible writers will be reduced, when entangled with the defence of Systems, which are contradictory to plain facts."[4]

He suggests other reasons why the dogma is neither acceptable nor respectable. The Fathers show an inconsistent attitude toward it. It is contrary to experience and observation, which are as valid when called into the service of theology as when used in other scientific inquiries. Experience and observation prove that

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1. Ibid., p. 311. 2. Ibid., p. 338. 3. Ibid., p. 341.
4. Ibid., p. 365.

the stubbornness of facts will eventually reduce "the opinions of men, to a compliance and conformity with themselves."[1] The fact is, that modern records are subject to obscurities, inaccuracies, and mistakes. A prejudiced outlook, a passionate cause, a failure of memory, a lack of knowledge, or a miscarriage in judgment is usually the reason. He argues, "When we see the same effects in ancient writings, how sacred soever they may be deemed, we must necessarily impute them to the same causes."[2]

His remarks were aimed at melting what Karl Barth speaks of as the "freezing up of the connection between Scripture and revelation."[3] The Reformers had contributed to this freeze, it persisted in the orthodoxy of the eighteenth-century churchmen, and it is evident among fundamentalist theologians today. Middleton was one of the few persons of his time who recognized its stranglehold on the Bible and the disservice it was rendering Christianity.

Although he shocked the orthodox divines who were his contemporaries, his views on the inspiration of Scripture have lost their shocking power. In support of his foresight that the stubbornness of facts would eventually bring men to a more reasonable view of inspiration, John Knox makes the following comment:

> At the outset it must be gratefully acknowledged that any willingness to make distinctions within the Bible as regards value or as regards degree and kind of certainty represents an advance upon the older fundamentalism. There was a time, I suspect, when some of the readers of this book, along with its author, were disposed to say: "Unless all of the Bible is equally true, and true in the same sense, we cannot know that any of it is true at all." No wonder we resisted so stubbornly the plain indications of error and inadequacy on the part of its writers! Undoubtedly . . . an important element in the true solution of this problem

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1. Ibid., p. 375. 2. Ibid., p. 375.

3. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God: Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics, authorised translation by G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1936), Vol. I, Part i, 139.

> for the believer lies in the acknowledgment that some statements of the Bible can make an absolute claim to truth which other statements cannot make.[1]

He goes on to emphasize that the development of criticism has been a major achievement in Biblical scholarship; it has enabled theologians to accept what few of them in the eighteenth century were able to see, "that the Bible is the literary deposit of the religious life and thought of the historical community--Hebrew-Jewish-Christian--in its most creative and formative period."[2]

Another statement which Knox makes shows how advanced Middleton's recognition of the advantages of viewing the sacred writings in their historical context was:

> Now it is clear that the acceptance of such a view frees us from some of the more painful dilemmas created by the earlier more magical conception and greatly aids the church in its apologetic task. It prepares us perfectly to understand and without any misgiving to accept the presence in the Bible of all the features which caused such embarrassment to the defenders of the older position--outmoded world view, inconsistencies, historical innacuracies, low moral standards, and all the rest. No human group is free from fault and error, and if the Bible is the reflection and record of the life of a historical community, we shall not expect it to be free from them. If there is supreme greatness in the Bible, it is there because something supremely great had happened within the life of the community which produced it; if there are error, smallness, and even sin in the Bible, they are there because error, smallness, and sin were to be found among the people whose corporate life is reflected in it.[3]

Middleton made other offerings to historical Biblical study, besides calling attention to the human element which affected the writing of the Scriptures, and wreaking havoc on the dogma of plenary inspiration; he anticipated form-criticism.

In his Essay on the Allegorical and Literal Interpretation of the Creation and Fall of Man, he criticizes the eighteenth-century

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1. Knox, op. cit., p. 45. 2. Ibid., p. 73. 3. Ibid., p. 74.

theologians for interpreting one sentence of Scripture literally and the next allegorically. This method is absurd and irrational, he insists. Reiterating and expanding his thesis in a discussion with Waterland, he prefers to consider the Fall a moral fable or an allegory. This form appears in other parts of Scripture, where "certain religious duties and doctrines, with the genuin [sic] nature and effects of them, are represented as it were to our senses, by a fiction of persons and facts which had no real existence."[1] Other religious writers, notably the Egyptians, also used fables. He concludes that an allegorical interpretation of the Fall helps clear the Christian Religion from those objections "which in all ages have shocked the faith of many, on their very entrance into it."[2]

Middleton's analysis of the literary style of the Fall and his critical approach to the Bible were viewed by his critics as a disposition to crumble Christianity. Partly because the historical method made its appearance, in Stephen's words, as "a comparatively crude and barren form of enquiry,"[3] Middleton was unable to make his contemporaries see that when the historical impulse could be more skillfully combined with the scientific, fruitful Biblical study would result.

Middleton's position in the development of Biblical criticism is probably best described as being parallel to it rather than in the direct line of it. He gives no indication of being significantly influenced by his predecessors in the field, mentioned earlier in the chapter, or of being aware of the work of Richard Simon, the Frenchman who had applied

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1. Middleton, Miscellaneous Works, II, 450. 2. Ibid., p. 456.
3. Stephen, op. cit., I, 377.

Spinoza's hermeneutic principles to Scripture. Still, he shows a critical outlook similar to the seventeenth-century fathers of Biblical criticism. Undoubtedly he was influenced, though he does not admit it--indeed, he would probably not have admitted it if he had been--by Richard Bentley's critical Dissertation on Phalaris.

Nor is there evidence that Middleton impressed the more prominent Biblical critics in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Nevertheless, there is a similarity between certain of his suggestions and the propositions of the recognized pioneer in form-criticism, Hermann Gunkel, namely, that Hebrew literature had borrowed literary structures from other religions in the ancient world, and that the forms had emerged from the situation which prevailed at the time the Bible was written.

Besides failing to influence immediately the development of Biblical criticism, Middleton was also unsuccessful in passing on an acute historical sense to the English theologians and historians in the last half of the eighteenth century. Even Hume apparently failed to respond to the scientific impulse when he turned from metaphysics to history. Evaluating Hume's historical work, published in 1752, Stephen is in agreement with other critics, when he calls it, "at best, a graceful summary of superficial knowledge."[1]

The reasons why the Englishmen failed to validate or use the historical method have already been either suggested or implied. To them Middleton's views were extreme. Scientific progress was slow.

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1. Ibid., p. 378

Interest in speculation was declining, and the subjects being discussed were insipid. Bible supernaturalism had, in the words of Farrar, "strangled all spiritual life, or at any rate impeded all spiritual growth, by the tight-wound swaddling bands of polemic orthodoxy."[1] It had affected theological speculation in the same way.

To Middleton, as well as to a few other champions of unorthodox views in the eighteenth century, goes the tribute for bearing what C. H. Dodd calls, "the tension through which truth becomes our possession."[2] He suggested to the preacher, the teacher, the critic, the student, and the hearer of the Gospel, a more excellent way of examining the records which witness to the sublime Event of history.

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1. Farrar, op. cit., p. 375. 2. Dodd, op. cit., p. 29.

CONCLUSION

Anything by way of a conclusion to this thesis will be a repetition of conclusions which have already been expressed.

The reader is aware by this time that the writer is in general agreement with Middleton, and especially when he says that, on the basis of the testimony, it cannot be argued that the Apostolic miraculous powers continued after the times of the Apostles.

The defense of the continuance of miracles by the eighteenth-century rationalistic theologians was lofty and theoretical. The divines were unwilling to examine the testimony with an open mind and to admit the conclusions toward which it obviously points. Middleton alone faced the problem which the testimony creates, and he did it with the ingenuity of an objective examiner.

Though the champion in the discussion, he is, nevertheless, open to criticism. His method is sometimes crude, and he is not always consistent in its application. He restricts its use without giving adequate reasons for doing so. Where empiricism cannot serve him, rationalism is called in to clinch his conclusions. His criticisms of the Fathers are not always fair, and they are sometimes too hastily drawn.

Still, any criticism of his method must take into account his determination to experiment at a time when theological discussion was discouraging experimentation.

Perhaps the most significant general conclusion that can be drawn is that the controversy over continuing miracles put the truth of the matter in a better perspective than it had ever been put before. In addition to this milestone, other developments which have proved to be of value were: the bid of empiricism for a place in theological studies; the challenge to the entrenched rationalists to face facts; the effort to vindicate the historical method of criticism; and the impulse given--though at the moment rejected--to the conception of Biblical criticism.

The immediate outcome of the discussion was of little significance. The controversy afforded another of those instances when an effort to get at the truth is temporarily thwarted--in this case by dogmatic blindness and stubbornness--, and crosses must be raised before light becomes evident.

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Workman, Herbert Brook, "The Eighteenth Century," The History of Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge. A Collective Work. Glasgow: Blackie and Son, Ltd., 1929. Part V, Chapter 3.

Yate, Richard. A Letter in Defence of Dr. Middleton: Being an Argument Proving From the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament That Miraculous Powers Were Never Truly Wrought but by Persons Divinely Inspired; and, Consequently, That the Pretended Miracles of the Fathers Are False and Forged. London: Printed for J. Payne and J. Bouquet, 1749.

APPENDIX

A Catalogue of Dr. Middleton's Works In The Order in Which They Were Published

1719. A Full and Impartial Account of All the Late Proceedings in the University of Cambridge Against Dr. Bentley,
A second part of the full and impartial Account of all the late Proceedings, etc. 8 vo.
Some Remarks upon a Pamphlet, entitled, The Case of Dr. Bentley Farther Stated and Vindicated, (wherein the Merit of the Author and his Performance, and the complaint of the Proctor Laughton, are briefly considered).
A True Account of the Present State of Trinity College in Cambridge, under the Oppressive Government of Their Master, Richard Bentley, Late D.D.

1720. Remarks, Paragraph by Paragraph, upon the Proposals Lately Published by Richard Bentley, for a New Edition of the Greek Testament and Latin Version, London.
(Some farther Remarks, Paragraph by Paragraph, upon proposals lately published for a new Edition of a Greek and Latin Testament, by Richard Bentley; containing a full Answer to the Editor's late Defence of his said Proposals, as well as to all his Objections there made against my former Remarks, London).

1723. Bibliothecae Cantabrigiensis Ordinadae Methodus Quaedam, Quam Domino Procancellario Senatique Academico Considerandam & Perficiendam Officii & Pietatis Ergo' Proponit. Cantabr. 4 to

1726. De Medicorum apud Veteres Romanos Degentium Conditione Differtatio; qua' contra Viros Celeberrimos Jac. Sponium & Rich. Meadium M.DD. Servilem Atque Ignobilem Eam Suisse Ostenditur. Cantabr.

1727. Dissertationis de Medicorum Romae Degentium Conditione Ignobili & Servili, Contra Anonymos Quosdam Notarum Brevium, Responsionis, a Que Animadversionis Auctores, Defensio. Pars Prima. Cantabr.

1729. A Letter from Rome, shewing an exact conformity between Popery and Paganism; or the Religion of the present Romans derived from that of their heathen Ancestors. London, 4to. published in May, 1729. The fourth Edition was published in London, 1741, in 8 vo. with a Prefatory Discourse and Postscript.

1731. A Letter to Dr. Waterland; containing some Remarks on his Vindication of Scripture; in answer to a Book, entitled, Chry. as Old as the Creation. Together with the Sketch or Plan of another Answer to the said Book. London, 8vo., published in December, 1730

A Defence of the Letter to Dr. Waterland, against the false and frivolous Cavils of the Author of the Reply. London, 8vo. published in November, 1731.

1732. Some Farther Remarks on a Reply to the Defence of the Letter to Dr. Waterland; wherein the Author's Sentiments, as to all the principal Points in Dispute, are fully and clearly explained in the manner that has been promised. London, 8vo. published in April, 1723.
Oraio de Novo Physiologiae Explicandae Munere Ex Celeberrimi Woodwardi Testamento Instituto: Habita Cantabrigiae in Scholis Publicis. Cantabr. 4to. published in July, 1732.

1733. Remarks On Some Observations Addressed to the Author of the Letter to Dr. Watterland. By the Author of the Letter. London, 8vo. published in May, 1733.

1735. A Dissertation Concerning the Origin of Printing in England: showing, that it was first introduced and practised by our Countryman, William Caxton, at Westminster, and not, as is commonly believed, by a foreign Printer at Oxford. Cambridge, 4to. published in Feb., 1734-5.

1741. The History of the Life of M. Tullius Cicero. London, 2 vol. 4to.

1743. The Epistles of M. T. Cicero to M. Brutus, and of Brutus to Cicero: with the Latin Text in the opposite Page, and English Notes to each Epistle: together with a prefatory Dissertation, in which the Authority of the said Epistles is vindicated, and all the Objections of the Rev. Mr. Tunstall particularly considered and confuted. London, 8vo. published in November, 1742.

1745. Germana Quaedam Antiquitatis Eruditae Monumenta, &c. London, 4to.

1747. A Treatise on the Roman Senate. London, 8vo. published in March, 1746-7.
An Introductory Discourse to a Larger Work, designed hereafter to be published concerning the miraculous Powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church from the earliest Ages, through several successive Centuries; tending to show, that we have no sufficient Reason to believe upon the Authority of the primitive Fathers, that any such powers were continued to the Church after the Days of the Apostles. With a Postscript, containing some Remarks on an Archdiaconal Charge, delivered last Summer by the Rev. Dr. Chapman to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Sudbury. London, 4to. published in April, 1747.

1748. Remarks on Two Pamphlets, Lately Published, against Dr. Middleton's Introductory Discourse. London, 8vo.

1749. A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church from the earliest Ages, through several successive Centuries. London, 4to. published in December, 1748.

1750. An Examination of the Lord Bishop of London's Discourses Concerning the Use and Intent of Prophecy; with some cursory Animadversions on his late Appendix, or Additional Dissertation, containing a farther Inquiry into the Mosaic Account of the Fall. London, 8vo. published in January, 1749-50.

POSTHUMOUS

A Vindication of the Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church, &c. from the objections of Dr. Dodwell and Dr. Church, London, 1751.

A Preface to an Intended Answer to All the Objections Made against the Free Inquiry.

Some Cursory Reflections on the Dispute or Dissension, Which Happened at Antioch, between the Apostles Peter and Paul.

Reflections on the Variations, or Inconsistencies, Which Are Found among the Four Evangelists, in their different accounts of the same facts.

An Essay on the Gift of Tongues, tending to explain the proper Notion and Nature of it, as it is described and delivered to us in the sacred Scripture: and as it appears also to have been understood by the Learned, both of the ancient and modern times.

Some Short Remarks on a Story Told by the Ancients, Concerning St. John the Evangelist, and Cerinthus the Heretic; and on the use which is made of it by the moderns, to enforce the duty of shunning heretics.

An Essay on the Allegorical and Literal Interpretation of the Creation and Fall of Man.

De Latinarum Pronunciatione Dissertatio.

Dr. Middleton's Letters to Mr. Warburton, &c.